

Psalms 16

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[0 : 00] How secure do you feel this afternoon? How secure are your relationships? How secure is your! How secure is your health and your future? Let me ask it in another way, are you sure you're! Are you sure you're going to be okay? Are you going to be okay this time next week, this time next month or this time next year? If the answer is not a resounding yes, and you can say that with great confidence then, this psalm is for you this afternoon. Most of you know our family is expecting another baby this week. I thought we'd spend a week or two, depending on what happens, looking at worn-off passages really, favourite passages. This is a favourite psalm of mine, so indulge me. David writes this psalm when he feels insecure, doesn't he? Look at what he says in verse 1. Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

Being a Christian, being one of God's people, doesn't make you immune to weakness and fear and vulnerability. David is crying out for protection, for preservation. He feels threatened, doesn't he, by something. And yet, the psalm strangely is full of positive emotion. We get words like delight and glad and joy and pleasure. It starts off quite sad, doesn't it? Preserve me, O God. But by the end, verse 9, look at how his demeanour changes. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices. And so we wonder what has happened to this insecure man. What is the therefore in verse 9, therefore? What journey has the threatened man gone through to be the secure man at the end of the psalm? We want to know his secret, don't we? And really, the message, the secret is really, really simple. David says, if you want to know and feel security, love God above all else. Love God above all else. What we might try and do in a difficult situation is to try and change the circumstances, isn't it? To try and get rid of the threat. But he is talking, it becomes clearer, about threats that we just cannot change. Listen to the way that he describes his threat. He says, verse 8, that it is something that might shake him.

He says, I won't be shaken. Verse 9, my flesh dwells secure. Verse 10, you won't let me see corruption. He is thinking about the biggest threat of all, isn't he? The threat of death. You won't abandon my soul to sheol, verse 10. That's the Hebrew word for the place of death. And he knows he's got no power against that threat. He doesn't pretend that he can deal with that himself. He doesn't just sort of prolong the inevitable or not think about it. The threat remains. But the solution is something within himself, isn't it? The way that his heart deals with that threat. He asks, does my heart seek after what can save me and satisfy me? And if not, I need to love God above all else. I want you to see three things about his affection, the ABC of his affections here.

[4 : 02] First of all, the aim of his affection. The aim of his affection. Notice how the psalm is full of decisions that David makes about the direction of his desires. Where he aims his affections.

He decides where his heart is going to lead him, doesn't he? It's like a bow and arrow and he aims his affection towards the target. And it's towards God. Towards God and his people above all else. So verse 2. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no good apart from you. Verse 8. I have set the Lord always before me. He's saying as much as it's within my power, I am deciding to desire God above all else. He decides that anything desirable that he can get in life, anything good that he can find in life, cannot be additional to God himself.

There is nothing outside of God himself that my heart will desire as much as him. Look at how he describes God in verse 5. The Lord is my chosen portion. I think a lot of portion is a better way of translating that actually. And he speaks about inheritance, doesn't he? It's the language of land being given and inheritance. You know the Old Testament people of God. They came to the promised land, didn't they? They arrived and they were designated plots or lots of land. Each tribe gets a slice of the land where they can live and be blessed.

It's their portion. It's their lot. And that's what it's all about, right? The land flown with milk and honey, the promised land. But no, he says, verse 5, the Lord is my allotted portion.

[6 : 09] He's saying the whole reason that I want to be in God's land and that anyone should want to be in God's land is because God is there. The milk and the honey and all of that is great, but only because he is there. God holds my lot. The greatest thing about being one of God's people is not that you get to go to heaven, it's that you get to be with God in heaven.

And heaven is only good for that reason. If you could describe your perfect day, what would it look like? What would you really love to be doing right now if you didn't have to do what you normally do? I hope you'd still be here. But imagine if you didn't have to work, if you had no responsibilities, if there were no limits to what you could do, where would your heart take you? What do you most love in life? What thrills you? What do you live for? What do you hope for? The way that we answer that question says an awful lot about us. Our affections show what we're really about. As Jesus says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And he is saying, isn't he, you could give me anything and everything that the heart might desire in this world, but unless God is there, my perfect day would be torture. There would be no good apart from him. And so he sets the Lord before him in his affections. He aims his affections towards God. But that is not an easy thing, is it?

And so secondly we see the battle of his affections. The battle of his affections. There is in his life the presence of those who would get him to love something else more. And there they are in verse 4. Those who run after other gods. And he mentions about their loves and their affections, doesn't he? What do they do? They pour out these drink offerings of blood.

Sounds pretty grim. We're not sure exactly what he's talking about. But he is definitely talking about worship practices of people around him. People whose idea of a perfect day would not involve his Lord. Pouring out drink offerings of blood, it sounds weird to us, doesn't it?

But to them it would have been normal. And it's just the normal things that people around him pursue and put all of their hope in. And today what are those things? Romance or money or independence or self-expression, whatever. It's not that those things are bad in themselves.

[9 : 01] But the battle is not fixing his affection on those things. Of participating in an act of worship. Of desiring those gods. It's realising that looking to those things in the world to save us is absolute madness. Because then his saviours would only need saving themselves.

Despite the allure of many good things, the battle is just to not go the way of the world. And so he reminds himself, doesn't he, if I do that, I won't be more happy. On the contrary, verse 4, those who run after other gods multiply in sorrow. It's the same phrase God used with Eve. When she left God and sinned to the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain.

That is what happens when you aim your affection somewhere else. That is where it leads you to suffering and pain and sadness and shame. So he reminds himself, short-lived pleasures cannot save me from the big threats. Only God has the power to secure me in those things. So I will not pour out their drink offerings. I won't go the way of the world. I need real security, not some sham, not some false sense of security. And so I love God above all else. He aims his affection, the battle for his affection. And thirdly, and I think this is where the rubber really hits the road. The challenge of his affection. As we heard this psalm read out, we think it is wonderful, isn't it? David speaks of his delight and joy in the one whose presence there is fullness of joy, verse 11, that your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. It's a wonderfully encouraging song.

But when you read between the lines, when you read more deeply, actually it's a very, very challenging psalm. Because we're told that true spiritual religion has to be not just about your head, but it's about your heart. And it has to be that. David writes this not just for himself in a sticky situation, but for the people of God who listen in and try and sing this song with him. It sets an example of how to be secure in God, isn't it? That we must love God above all else. And it's full of very deep and very emotional language. It is about the desire of the heart, not just the creeds of our minds. It is about what we love the most. It's very heady, isn't it? It's very convicting.

And some of these words are a real challenge to get out if we try and sing them. Can we really sing with him with 100% conviction? You are my Lord. I have no good apart from you. Can you sing that, really? Can we truly sing the Lord is my allotted portion and be okay with that?

[12 : 34] The 18th century preacher Jonathan Edwards, he preached in the New World. He wrote his famous book, The Religious Affections. And he preached about this a lot, about the direction of our hearts with God. And he's really challenging. He says, just for a moment, imagine the scenario where all of the threats of your life could be taken away. Imagine where death is out of the picture and you can live forever. And he asks, would you rather live here on earth in prosperity for all eternity, but destitute of the presence of God and communion with him? Having no spiritual

relationship with him and your souls, God and you are strangers. Would you choose this rather than to leave this world full of pleasure in order to dwell in heaven where you can enjoy God for all eternity? In other words, he's asking you, isn't he, what's your perfect day? What's your perfect eternity? Life full of the best pleasures on earth, but with no God? Or leave those pleasures behind and have God? Or put it another way, he says, if you had to stay in this world, would you rather live in mean and low circumstances with the gracious presence of God or live forever in earthly prosperity without him? Somebody has paraphrased Jonathan Edwards, saying the critical question for our generation and for every generation is this. If you could have heaven with no sickness and with all the friends you've ever had on earth, all the food you've ever liked, the leisure activities you've ever enjoyed, the natural beauties you've ever seen, the physical pleasures you've ever tasted and no human conflict or any natural disasters at all, would you be satisfied with that heaven if God were not there? When we think about that, that is the challenge of Psalm 16, isn't it? It asks us the question and it forces us to ask, what is the best thing that we think we can get from God? And if it isn't God himself, we really have missed the point. That is not true spiritual religion. And actually, it's no wonder that we feel insecure. Even in my best moments, I've got to admit,

I don't love God enough above all else. And in those moments, that is why I feel so vulnerable. And I feel insecure. Because in reality, I desire and love and put my hope in things that actually cannot keep me secure. It's logical, isn't it? The challenge is so strong of this psalm, so strong, in fact, that we know that not even David himself lived up to it. We know the life of David, don't we?

There are times when he didn't practice what he preached here. And we know that in the end, his flesh did not dwell secure, did it? He died. We know that David's body did see corruption. David's body is rotting somewhere right now in the Near East somewhere, isn't it? Later in the New Testament, the Apostle Peter, he preaches his famous sermon at Pentecost, just a few days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he goes straight to this psalm.

He quotes it in Acts chapter 2. And we realise with Peter in that moment that King David was looking to another king.

[16 : 39] He was looking to one who would love God with all of his heart, mind, and soul, and strength. Whose body would be killed, but whose life would be secure, whose flesh would be secure, who wouldn't see corruption, whose soul was not abandoned to Sheol.

He was looking to the resurrected Son of God, who truly walked on the path of life, and enjoyed fullness of joy in God.

And so, this psalm comes with a bit of a health warning, doesn't it? We shouldn't read this psalm as if it's purely for us. Or even as if it's purely for David, the great king.

We should read it with an eye on Jesus. Because neither David nor us have done what this psalm asks. Only Jesus Christ has loved God above all else.

More than life itself. He was offered the world, wasn't he, by Satan. And he took God. And he loved him above all else.

[17 : 51] He loved him to death. And he did that, that we might be able to sing this psalm. Even with our weak convictions.

Because we are not the choir masters with this psalm. Neither is King David, but King Jesus is. And even with our poor affections, Jesus died and lived this life that we might start to aim our desires towards God.

And choose not to go the way of the world. So think about that question this week. Are you going to be okay? Yes.

But you must trust Jesus. The one who makes resurrection and total security a reality for us. Who allows us to truly say and know with David.

You are my Lord, God. And I have no good apart from you. My heart is glad. My whole being rejoices.

[19 : 04] And my flesh dwells secure. Let's pray. Let's pray.