

Psalms 16:10

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[0 : 00] And David writes this, For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, that is the place of death, Sheol is hell really, or let your holy one see corruption.

! I quite like the poet Steve Turner, he's an English journalist, a poet and biographer. And let me read you one of his poems, it's called Death Lib. The liberating thing about death is in its fairness for women, its acceptance of blacks, its special consideration for the sick.

And I like the way that children aren't excluded, homosexuals are welcomed, and militants aren't banned. Con men can't con it, thieves can't nick it, bullies can't scare it, magicians can't trick it, boxers can't punch it, nor critics dismiss it.

Don't knows can't know, the lazy can't miss it, governments can't ban it, or the army defuse it. Judges can't jail it, lawyers can't sue it, capitalists can't bribe it, socialists can't share it, terrorists can't jump it, the third world aren't spared it, scientists can't quell it, nor can they disprove it, doctors can't cure it, surgeons can't move it, Einstein can't have it, Guevara can't free it, the thing about dead is we're all going to be it.

It's a brilliant poem. And it's hard, isn't it, to argue with the thesis of Turner's poem. And yet this morning, whether we are very young or whether we're very old, we'd rather not talk about it.

[1 : 42] And that's not always been the case about death. Those in the 19th century, they had a morbid fascination with the subject of death.

They were very coy when it came to things about sexuality, but they were very open and interested in death. We're the exact opposite today, aren't we? Sex is everywhere, but we try to keep death hidden as much as possible.

One person put it like this, if the 19th century tried to conceal the facts of life, the 20th and 21st centuries have tried to conceal the facts of death.

Apparently to some, we need to try and repeal death to get rid of it. We need to do away with death if we can. The New Yorker magazine had an essay written this year by a man called Tad Friend. And the article was entitled The God Pill Silicon Valley's Quest for Eternal Life. And the essay opens with a description of the high and mighty jammed into Norman Lear's living room in Mandeville Canyon, high above the rest of Los Angeles.

[2 : 56] And they were all there, this group of people, to learn more about the secrets to longevity. Nobel Prize winning scientists, entertainers like Goalie Horn, and the musician Moby, they were there.

Tech billionaires like the Google co-founder Sergey Brin, all present at this party because it was the kick-off event for an organization. The organization is called The National Academy of Medicine's Grand Challenge in Healthy Longevity.

It's a very catchy title. And one doctor articulated the goal of the challenge. He said that the challenge is to end aging forever.

Aaron Sabati, who's a 30-year-old startup founder, confidently told Tad Friend the proposition that we can live forever is obvious. It doesn't violate the laws of physics, so we will achieve it.

And so the question is, who is closer to the truth? Is Aaron Sabati, the startup founder, or Steve Turner, the poet?

[4 : 07] And to think about that, I want us to look at Psalm 16. Psalm 16, there's no real subheading, it just says, it calls it a mictum of David, a song of David. And we're not given in the title clues to the context.

But it's a trying circumstance. How do we know it's a trying circumstance? Well, look at what it says. David here talks about God as his refuge, verse 1.

God is my refuge, so I'll never be shaken. But it's what David writes, particularly towards the end of the psalm, that I want us to look at in verses 9 and 10. David says, Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices.

My flesh also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to shale, or let your Holy One see corruption. You read that, and I think we become aware of realism about death, and optimism about life forever.

That's both there in both those verses. It's realism about death, and optimism about living forever. Both Steve Turner and Ernst Betty. So how do you hold those things together?

[5 : 22] Now I don't want to spoil the punchline by giving away too much up front, but here is how. Here's what we will see today. But this psalm points us forward to the fact that through his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated death.

And proved himself to be the eternal life-giving king. Three headings. Number one, the reality of death. Number two, the defeater of death. And number three, the sure hope of everlasting life. And so, that we might see through his resurrection, Jesus defeated death and proved himself to be the eternal life-giving king. Let's see the reality of death. Jesus, David clearly, in verse 10, acknowledges the reality of death, doesn't he?

And it's accompanying decay. Whatever the promise that David is holding on to, that we will come to in a moment, he knows that the statistics are pretty sobering, aren't they?

That one out of one die. You can live to be the oldest person in the world at the moment. It's a woman called Violet Brown.

[6 : 27] She's a Jamaican lady. She is 117 years old. But death will come to Violet Brown. Death is always a shock, but it shouldn't be a surprise for any of us.

Even the simple fact that as we look around, everything in this world is heading in that direction. Essentially, it seems to be falling apart.

Every nation, every empire, every corporation, everything is on a long-term path to decline. Nothing in this world will last.

150 years ago, scientists would have told us that the world was solid and that matter has always existed. But today, physicists point, don't they, to the second law of thermodynamics. and they tell us that matter is nothing but energy in motion. And the particular configuration of energy that we call matter and we think is solid is gradually winding down and is moving towards more and more disorder.

[7 : 36] Take the chicken, for example. Let's say you go home and you get a cooked chicken out of the oven. And when you take a chicken out of the oven, you don't eat it straight away because there's so much energy that when you cut it open all the juices kind of go flying around.

But you let the energy scatter, don't you? You let it sit for a while. The energy scatter and run down and after a while you can eat it. You let the chicken sit.

But let's say for the purposes of research you allowed me to leave the chicken that you've cooked for dinner out on the counter. Not just for an hour or a day or a week or a month.

But let's leave the chicken out for six months on your counter. And what we would do is we would see the second law of thermodynamics in vivid detail. The energy would continue to scatter.

And the next thing you know is the chicken would be oozing, falling apart into pieces. It would stink up the kitchen and the whole house. Here's a pleasant thought for you on this beautiful Sunday morning.

[8 : 51] That when you look at that chicken you are essentially looking at yourself. You are the chicken. because you and I are falling apart.

No one can restore the energy that is expending itself, that is working itself out. All that taking good care of your diet, all that colouring your hair is not going to prevent the inevitable.

All that doing the park run. everything in this world left to itself is falling apart. And it's heading to decay.

And the logical conclusion is the reality of death. Here's how C.S. Lewis put this truth, isn't it? His 1948 essay on living in an atomic age, he says, nature does not in the long run favour life.

If nature is all that exists, in other words, if there is no God and no life of some quite different sort outside nature, then all the stories will end in the same way.

[10 : 01] In a universe from which all life is banished, without possibility of return, life will have been an accidental flicker and there will be no one even to remember it.

Now most of you will be relieved to know that's the first point over and done with. But it's pretty sobering, isn't it? In fact, life is pretty depressing. But it's nothing that you didn't know. You know this, you just hide from it. But with our second point, we happily turn a definite corner from the reality of death to the defeater of death.

The reality of death is implied, isn't it, in Psalm 16. It's not overt in what David wrote. But the implicit reality of death, however, is placed by the explicit assertion that David makes, which is utterly optimistic.

David says, doesn't he, look at what he says in verse 10, he's saying, my body will rest secure. God will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will he let his faithful ones see decay.

[11:13] David is a hope, doesn't he, that God will somehow deliver him from the reality of death. Now, before we think about that, what David means, I think it's important to see how this Psalm, up to this point, has led him to that place of confidence for the future.

And so David's argument from verses 1 to 8 boils down to this, because God, verse 1, has been his refuge, God has been his provider and protector in the past, David has confidence that God will take care of him in the future.

There's a lot more in the first eight verses than that. But that is what it boils down to. God has been my refuge in the past, and so I can trust him in the future.

That is the biblical contour, isn't it, of the reality of biblical faith. That is the shape of what living by faith is like. God's trustworthiness in the past, gives me robust hope for what he will do in the future. Certainly be true in my life. And the times when I seem most anxious and most worried about the future, when I can't shake off concerns about the uncertainties which lie ahead of me, inevitably that is in large part because I'm having another bout of spiritual amnesia.

[12:37] I've forgotten how time and time again God has taken care of me in the past. And God has never let me down. And God has always been faithful.

He has always been a refuge. God has always kept his promises. And so here at the end of the psalm, David is banking on God to continue to demonstrate those character traits.

Continuing to demonstrate that same faithfulness, that same goodness, that same generosity into the future. Now it's at this point that those who've studied Psalm 16 and the commentators there's a parting of the ways.

Because some think that David is just trusting that God will protect him from some imminent death. That God will preserve David, that God will look after David from some untimely death.

Whether that's going to be at the hands of King Saul or something else. Other commentators think that David is looking forward not just to preservation from death, but that God is going to deliver David out of death.

[13:44] That David was demonstrating that God will not only guard his life until death, but God will grant him life after death as well. And part of the commentators disagree the way they differ is simply because what we have right in this psalm is not completely straightforward, is it?

It's not clear. And so it could be one or it could be the other. Or it could be both together. But actually as I studied it, I think there is something in the text which suggests that David is looking beyond his own situation to something else.

Let me take a bit of a run at it at verse 10 by reading to you from verse 5. Can you look at your Bibles and look at verse 5? And as I read it, I want you to notice that there is something different. That David has quite deliberately put emphasis in a certain place so that you and I will see that he's to me much, much bigger than just his own deliverance from death. So let's look at verse 5. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

[15:03] Indeed I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also my heart instructs me.

I have set the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand. I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices.

My flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy ones see corruption.

Now it strikes me isn't it? What do you see from verses 5 to the first part of verse 10? It is me and my and I and then you come to the second half of verse 10 and suddenly you are hit with a your your holy one will not see decay.

Now it is possible that David is speaking about himself but it would seem to me that David has deliberately shifted and he is talking now about someone else in the second half of verse 10.
[16:14] Someone who is perhaps related to him but distinct from him. That David is confident that someone else will not see decay. Now if that is all that we have to go on you might say well that is really nice theory and thank you Paul for spending time this week thinking about that but who is to know and you would be right.

But that is not all we have. And so let's wind the tape forward a thousand years to the city of David to Jerusalem where we find that thousands of people have travelled from all over Asia Minor to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

And thousands of people there did not know when they arrived on that day they would be witnesses of the first explicit Christian sermon that is preached by the apostle Peter.

And it's primarily there isn't it that sermon to explain the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those gathered that day. So let's go to Acts chapter 2. Let's go to Acts chapter 2.

And let's pick up Peter's sermon. And so in Acts chapter 2 and verse 28. Peter says you've made known to me the paths of life and you will make me full of gladness with your presence.

[17:28] which is a quote from Psalm 16. Our very first Christian sermon the apostle Peter goes to our psalm and he says Psalm 16 is a crucial piece of evidence for the events of what happened 50 days earlier.

He says the psalm explained why it was possible for Jesus to remain in the realm of the dead because it was Jesus who had God's promise of Psalm 16. That the holy one would not see decay in the grave and it's a promise to Jesus.

So Peter continues his line of argument. Look at verse 29. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and he was buried and his tomb is with us to this day.

Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God has 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 to Sheol to the place of death.

Nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Do you see what Peter is saying? Peter is saying that David was looking forward to someone other than himself as the one who would not see decay.

[18:52] That if David had been referring to himself it was manifestly not true. Because Peter says David did die. David's body has rotten.

And if you want to check it out you can pay the price of admission for tourists the tomb is over there go and visit it. But Peter continues he says David spoke as a prophet that one of his descendants would not just be the earthly king of Israel but would be the king the promised anointed Messiah and it was this king this holy one to whom David was referring to in the psalm.

So that the words of the psalmist were ultimately really the words of Jesus. That David was pointing forward to the Messiah to Jesus that he would not be abandoned to the realm of the dead that his body would not see decay.

And that's just what happened Peter said. All the witnesses are here today go and speak to them. Peter says we have just been witnesses to the defeater of death.

And so he quotes Psalm 16 verse 10 twice in the sermon because it explains what they had experienced. These people had seen Jesus' actual physical body.

[20:15] The psalm fits with what they knew about Jesus from observation. That he came alive after death. And his body had not literally decayed. No one knew exactly how it happened.

We thought about this a couple of weeks ago, didn't we? We thought about how at 2 or 3 or 4 a.m. as that cold body lied on the slab.

Suddenly there was the sound of the dead heart started beat. And blood began to course through veins and he sits up and he steps onto his two feet.

He who was dead is now alive again. And the angels moved the stone and he walks out of the tomb.

And he gets out of his grave clothes. We know not the how. He tests for the very first time a resurrected body and he walks into the light.

[21:31] And it is a remarkable thing to think honestly what is going through Jesus' consciousness at that point. It really is finished. Christ is paid.

Death is dead. Life has won. Christ has conquered. We know don't we what was going through Peter's mind and the other disciples' mind.

But despite the fact that Jesus had told them again and again in his lifetime over and over and over again he would tell them I'm going to die but I'm going to rise again. I'm going to die but I'm going to rise again. The resurrection comes as complete shock.

And then they see him. And they remember and they see that Jesus, this Jesus who had been dead and buried was now alive and kicking.

And talking and walking and touching and eating because God had not abandoned him to decay. Jesus was alive here because he is the defeater of death.

[22 : 35] That brings us to our third point the sure hope of everlasting life. It's sometimes argued that Peter's main goal in this sermon on the day of Pentecost was to prove that Jesus had really risen from the dead.

But when you look at the sermon when you talk about the sermon it doesn't seem to be his goal for the simple fact that in his sermon he's not arguing for the kind of veracity or the historicity of the resurrection.

That may be a question for people today. But then he says I don't have to because look all the eyewitnesses are here you've just got to talk to them. But they saw Jesus has been raised from the dead.

I don't think the Bible ever seeks to prove that Jesus has risen from the dead. I don't think that's what is going on even in 1 Corinthians 15. They just assume it and say believe the eyewitnesses. And Peter's aim here is because Jesus has risen from the dead dead. And his body did not see decay. He must be the promised Messiah. He must be the king of whom Psalm 16 was speaking. [23 : 42] And his main point is that a risen Jesus is a risen king. But the resurrection proves that Jesus is ruler over all.

He is judge over all. And that explains why at the end of the sermon Peter preaches that the people were literally kept to the heart and they asked what must we do.

Because if Jesus is risen he is the risen king. And what you must do is repent and you must turn away from the false gods which you have been following.

That you think I'm going to bring you what you want in life. You turn away from those idols. Psalm 16 verse 4 says they will only increase your misery and your sorrow in life. And so you repent and put your trust in Jesus.

It's so fascinating isn't it? The book of Acts when it speaks about how they preach the gospel. They don't say God really loves you.

[24 : 44] God's got a really great plan for your life. And God died for you. Please, please, please come and take it. They only preach the resurrection shows that Jesus is Lord and what are you going to do about it?

Will you repent and will you believe? Will you bow your little knee? And the same command comes to us. The resurrection is proof not only that Jesus has authority over death but he has authority over all things because he's been raised to be king.

And so the only right response is to repent, turn around and to put our trust in him. And you might say to me, why should I do that? Why should I repent?

Why should I bring my life under the rule of Jesus of Nazareth? Well, two reasons. One, this is the king who died for you.

He's the king who died for you. Three days before he walked out of the tomb, he was hanging on a cross. And it looked like the end, but it wasn't the end.

[25 : 52] And he was dying for the sins of every person who has banked their life on him. He was taking the punishment and the penalty, the deserved penalty, face people's pride, face people's selfishness, face people's greed, for your rejection of him.

And so we have to trust in Jesus, in what Jesus did for us on that first Good Friday. And the promise to you is that every sin that you've ever committed, every single thing is paid for.

And so there's no need for shame and there's no need for guilt in your life ever again. Knowing that those sins have been paid for by the king, the king who died for you.

The second reason why you should put your trust in Jesus takes us back to the final verse of Psalm 16. Psalm 16 verse 11. Where David says, You make known to me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. I don't know whether you can see the connection between verse 10 and verse 11.

[27 : 11] The amazing and the great news, that when you entrust your life to Jesus, when you bring your life under the control of Jesus Christ, the Jesus that was not abandoned to the grave, the Jesus who did not see decay, then Psalm 16 becomes your son too.

Because those things become true of you as well. Unless Jesus comes back first, you and I will experience death sooner or later.

But for those who trust in Jesus, death no longer has the final word. Decay is not the final state. Jesus' resurrection changed all of that. It's not that we're put into some neutral existence, or limbo, or something like that. For those who trust in Jesus, the Psalmist recognizes that there is the guarantee, isn't there, of solid future joys and lasting pleasure.

Mike Reeves puts it this way, the tomb is the womb of the new creation. You know, because the one who has defeated death is the king and has the power to do all things.

[28 : 36] And he has committed that power to exercise his authority and usher in the new creation, this new reality, solid joys, unlasting treasure, fullness of joy.

Sam asks down and off in the Lord of the Rings, is everything sad going to come untrue?

There's a question. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What a question for the saints in Surrey Chapel this morning, who have lost their minister.

For that family that have lost a father and a husband. Is everything sad going to come untrue? And the answer of Jesus, the resurrected king to that question is yes it is.

For those who put their trust in me, for those who bank their life on me, everything sad will come untrue. And Jesus promises a future of solid joy and everlasting pleasure.

[29 : 47] When you start to look through the New Testament as to what that future reality will be like, you find words like imperishable and unspoiled and unfading and the Christian future is one where there will be permanence and immortality and no illness will strike you there.

No hurt will deflate you or destroy you. You will not have to dye your hair. You'll last forever.

Permanence can be a bad thing couldn't it?

However, if we have to live with the sinful rebellious nature that we come into this world with. But here permanence is a good thing in the future reality. Because the Bible says that in that future reality you will also be sinless and nothing will be spoiled.

there will be no more pride no more short temper no more jealousy no more getting angry with the kids on a Sunday morning no more greed no more selfishness no more insecurity no more loneliness no more anger and you'll not only be permanent and sinless but you will be beautiful beyond compare there will be no more law second law of thermodynamics you will not be that chicken any longer you will not get run down you will not fall apart nothing in this future reality will fade or fail and nothing will perish and nothing will spoil it is a glorious future it is a glorious future that is guaranteed by an event in the past in the past the resurrection of Jesus the king and David says in the final verse of Psalm 16 he says that the path of this life is not just for the future it has begun already it is now it is now and it's not yet he says you have made known you make known to me the path of life that is once you know that there is life after death you come to realise that there is life before death too it changes everything the future joy pushes back into the present life in our relationship with the living Jesus we discover that there are solid joys and lasting pleasures in this life right here right now we get a taste of them through Jesus you can find true satisfaction and contentment and joy and peace now this morning Alistair McGrath theologian tells once of meeting a man who had been held prisoner in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Singapore and the man told McGrath that the astonishing change in the camp atmosphere came about when one of the prisoners who owned a short wave radio learned of the collapse of the Japanese war effort in the middle of 1945 and although all in the camp still remained prisoners they knew that their enemy had been beaten that it would only be a matter of time before they were released those prisoners literally at that point began to laugh and to cry as if they were free already and that is the same for you and

I now that is the message of the resurrection that we know don't we in one sense this future reality it has not yet come but in another sense it has Jesus resurrection declares that Jesus the king has already defeated sin and death and evil their backbone has been broken and we can begin to live now and we can begin to walk the path of life now and in light of that victory no matter what the circumstances of life around us the sure hope of everlasting life is with us in the present Steve

Turner was right the thing about dead is we're all going to be it but the thing about life is you've got to choose it you've got to choose it through his resurrection

[34 : 43] Jesus defeated death he proved himself to be the eternal life giving king he says to you this morning don't you want this life won't you choose it won't you put your trust in me and he questions you like Ezekiel questioned the people of Israel why oh why will you die God says for I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked declares the Lord God so turn and live the thing about dead is we're all going to be it but the thing about life you've got to choose it choose life let's pray