

No Good Apart

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] I wonder if you would take your Bible and open to Psalm 16 on page 453. And when you get there, put a finger in place and turn over to Luke 24.

Two places in the Bible. We're going to do a little bit of flicking around today. That's not our usual style, but I have a deep concern that you will go to sleep during this time, despite what I've just prayed.

So, Psalm 16, have that there, and we're going to start in Luke 24. We began a series on the Psalms last week because we desperately, desperately need to learn how to pray.

And I want to begin by looking at this verse in Luke 24 that Jesus says on the day of the resurrection. Luke 24, verse 44, well known.

The risen Jesus, speaking to the disciples, says, And quite literally, it is everything about me in the Psalms, about the Moses and the prophets and the Psalms.

[1 : 32] In other words, in Jesus' view, we can never read the Psalms rightly. We can never be rightly shaped by the Psalms unless we read them through him, through Jesus.

Everything in the Psalms, Jesus is saying there, that's what the Greek means, everything in the Psalms is about him. So, as we read the Psalms and pray the Psalms and sing the Psalms, we need to do it through Jesus.

There is no other book from the Old Testament that's more often quoted in the New Testament than the Psalms. And Jesus himself, his own view of his identity and his ministry was formed, very formed, through reading the Psalms.

And he speaks in terms drawn from the Psalms. The Psalms give us the key to understanding Jesus. And I want to push this during this sermon for you.

We must read the Psalms through Jesus. And Psalm 16 gives us a perfect model for doing that. So, let's flip back to Psalm 16. So, when you read the Psalms, let me put it this way.

[2 : 47] Because of what Jesus says in Luke 24 and elsewhere in the New Testament, it explains the double experience that we have with the Psalms. On the one hand, there's hardly a book that's more precious to us as Christians.

It gives us more spiritual sustenance and nurture that draws our hearts out. But at the same time, there's so much in the Psalms that's just alien and foreign to us.

I mean, there's a strangeness in reading the Psalms, isn't there? I mean, you think of... Here, let me just quote you a psalm. You made me head of the nations.

People who I had not known served me. As soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me. Foreigners came cringing to me. Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses. Can you say that?

It's not true of me. I'm more readily identified with the one that says, the verse that says, because of my obvious plague, people walk on the other side of the street.

[3 : 49] What about today's psalm, Psalm verse 10, where David calls himself the Holy One? Are you happy to call yourself the Holy One? Who is the I?

Who is the me who is writing the Psalms? Who knows reading through Psalm 16? There's so much in the Psalms and so much in Psalm 16 that, if I'm honest, I just can't say truly.

As I've read the Psalms, I can join very wholeheartedly in the repentant Psalms. As can you, or you should. But the majority of the Psalms seems way too high.

It seems almost impossible, humanly impossible. And most of the sermons I hear on Psalms and most of the commentators say that the solution to this is we should read the Psalms as an example to us.

A pattern for us to live up to. They're there to express our faith and our spirituality and our spiritual moods. They set up King David as a kind of perfect believer and say this is how you should live. [4 : 57] But what happens when the Psalms don't mirror my spiritual mood? What if they don't reflect anything about me? Or a little more subtly, look down at verse 8 in Psalm 16.

I have set the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand. I shall not be shaken. Is that true of you? I believe the truth of that verse.

And sometimes I feel as though I've entered into the sort of outskirts of that experience. But to be honest with you, I have not always set the Lord always before me. I haven't done that this week. And if you look down at verse 10, I fully expect my body after it is buried to see corruption. It seems almost impossible. You see, if we just have David as an example, sometimes he is an example to us, but if we just reduce him to an example, that's going to end either in despair or discouragement because you can't lift yourself up to his level or it's going to give you brief moments of self-righteousness when you do.

So the question is, who is it that the Psalms are written for? Who is it that fits the Psalms best? How do we draw spiritual nourishment? What does it mean to read them through Jesus?

[6 : 15] And I want to look at Psalm 16 and make three simple points. That there are three characters, three people, three candidates who we have to keep in mind as we're reading the Psalms.

And the first, of course, of course, of course, is David. You go back to verse 1. It's a miktam of David. You see that little heading, by the way, at the beginning of verse 1?

That's part of the original text. The Psalms are the Psalms of David. Have you ever thought about that? He didn't write every single one, but he is by far the dominant figure in the Psalms.

And Moses is mentioned a couple of times, Abraham a couple of times, but David spoke it of 90 times in the Psalms. 90, 9-0. Nobody else comes close to that.

And when David writes these Psalms, he's not just writing as any old pious Old Testament believer. He is writing self-consciously as the Lord's anointed. God chose him as a king.

[7 : 19] God made massive promises to David. Massive promises. One of which was that from him and from his descendants, God would bring a king who would rule an eternal kingdom, who would bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

And God anointed, or had David anointed with oil, and the word anoint in Hebrew is the word Messiah. And when it comes into the New Testament in Greek, it's the word Christ. Christ. So let's be clear, anointing, Christ and Messiah, all the same thing.

Okay? They all mean the same thing. We use them interchangeably. When we read the Psalms, we are reading the Lord's anointed, the Messiah, speaking, praying, singing, lamenting.

And as we read the Psalms, our point of view, the view of life, our view of history in the world and of God is from the Messiah's point of view. This is very important. The Psalms are not just everyone's experience of spirituality.

They're not just there to primarily give expression to my faith or yours. They're there to give expression to the Messiah's faith. And as we pray them, we are shaped into the Messiah's point of view of things.

[8 : 35] But the first thing we need to remember is that they are Messiah's prayer book. And here in Psalm 16, you can see David, it's very personal for David. He uses the word I, me, my 25 times in the Psalm.

And he's writing self-consciously as the Messiah. In verse 10, he calls himself the Holy One, God's Holy One. However, you don't have to go far in the Psalm until we run up against the same difficulty that we have that I mentioned before.

I mean, just look at verse 1. Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. He is facing death. He's threatened with death. And so he looks at God, verse 2, and he says, I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, I have no good apart from you.

You are all I desire. Everything I want and wish for is in you. Apart from you there is nothing. Apart from you is no true satisfaction. There is nothing outside of God, nothing in addition to you.

But you know what? If we're honest, that's not always true for David. A couple of years ago we had a series on the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel about David.

[9 : 49] And I thought the series was great, great fun actually. We saw very clearly that David was God's chosen, but he was just as sinful as you and I, just as weak.

He did not set the Lord before him when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. He did not have the Lord at his right hand when he had Bathsheba's husband murdered.

God was not all his good. He did not delight in the holy ones when he covered up the rape of his daughter and refused to take action in his psalms.

Sorry, his sons. So when we read the psalms of David and when we put them beside the historical record, we see that David is punching above his weight.

He's writing as the Lord's anointed. That's why it can be quite difficult to say he's just an example to us. Not just an example to us. Let's see this even more clearly in the second half of the psalm.

[10:57] Let's look at the last three verses of the psalm. In verse 10, David sees that he is going to go through death, but something's going to happen in death that will reverse the usual effect.

So that David's body will not decay. He will not see corruption. My question to you is, did that happen? No. David's body was buried and saw corruption.

What David is doing here is meditating on the massive promises of God to him, I think probably specifically, that one of his descendants will come and rule on the eternal throne, God's great Messiah, who would bring eternal peace and salvation to all people, but he sees it's going to come through resurrection.

And what David's doing here is he's reveling in the promises of God, which he knows in the end are not just given to him and will not just come true in him and his life, but in the life of the one whom God will send, the Messiah to the world.

David is deliberately speaking above his pay grade because of his confidence of the coming Christ. So the first person who fits the Psalms is David, but he kind of fits, he kind of doesn't fit.

[12:32] All right? We have to keep him in mind. He points to the second person, who of course is Jesus, and Jesus fits the Psalms perfectly. So, let's move to the second fit, and I want to do this.

Keep your finger in Psalm 16 and turn over to Acts chapter 2, shall we? Acts chapter 2. It's a long way to the right.

Page 910, 910. We've moved from looking how David fits the Psalms.

Now we're going to see how Jesus fits them perfectly. And this is about seven weeks after the resurrection. And during those seven weeks, Jesus has been teaching the disciples how to understand the Old Testament.

This day is the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit has been poured out on God's people. And the Apostle Peter is explaining to the crowd how they crucified Jesus. And then he comes to chapter 2, verse 24.

[13:37] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death. It was not possible for him to be held by death. And then he says, for David says concerning him, and then he quotes Psalm 16.

I saw the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. These are the words of the Messiah, you see. I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, my tongue rejoiced, my flesh will dwell in hope.

These are the words of the Messiah. David is speaking concerning him. You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness in your presence. And then Peter raises the problem of Psalm 16 for us in the very next verse, verse 29.

Brothers, sisters, he says, I may say to you with confidence that the patriarch David, he died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day.

[14:39] In other words, his body was a mouldering in the grave. In fact, if you go to Jerusalem today, you can find the traditional grave of David. There's nothing there, of course, because his body decayed.

How is that possible? How is it possible that David could have said Psalm 16, verse 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 the throne, David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ. That he, the Christ, was not abandoned to Hades. Nor did his, Christ's flesh, seek corruption. This Jesus, God raised up.

And of that we are all witnesses. See? Peter says David is prophesying. He's not ultimately speaking about himself. He's speaking for God's great Messiah.

And David clearly saw that Jesus, the Messiah, would be raised from the dead. We must read the Psalms through Jesus, because he fits them perfectly. It's amazing to me today.

[15:47] Some commentators still say that there's nothing in the Old Testament about the resurrection. I don't know how they do that, but this in the Bible. However, David knew he would have a descendant, and he prophesied Jesus' resurrection.

And if you think about Psalm 16 carefully, David prophesied about a person who enters into death, who goes through death, but is not left in death, so that his body doesn't decay.

So God's Messiah, if he's going to be God's Messiah, must die, genuinely die, and then God will not abandon him into death, and his body will not be corrupt. And that is exactly the point of the resurrection appearances, as we saw two weeks ago, isn't it?

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, what they witnessed was a physical body, uncorrupted, undecayed, renewed. There was not one part of his body left decaying in the tomb.

When Jesus appears to them, he says, I'm not a ghost, I'm not an apparition. Flesh, flesh and bones, touch me. I have not seen corruption. See? He fits absolutely perfectly. And Psalm 16 gives us deeper understanding and the categories in which to understand the resurrection of Jesus.

[17:06] It's wonderful stuff. But I must race on. I said there are three people we must keep in mind who fit the psalm. There's David, who fits at Conor.

There's Jesus, who fits at Conor. And finally, us, of course. It's only because Jesus Christ fits perfectly that those who belong to Christ fit the psalm as well.

Now, stay with me. Nine o'clock congregation, very sleepy. Don't know what... You're a much better congregation. And you'll need to repent of your pride later about it, I'm sure.

If Jesus is the one who perfectly fits the psalms, what that means is that our connection with the psalms is deeper than we can possibly say.

It's not just a mirror for our feelings. You can get that from Shakespeare or some poetry. It's not just a high example to us, although it is an example, but you can get that from biography.

[18:12] The true significance of the psalms lie in the person and work of Jesus and what he did for us. And this is the point I'm going to look at the next passage.

That Jesus died and rose again, not for his own benefit, but for us, so that all the prophecies of the Old Testament come to bear in Jesus and then come to bear on us as well.

So let's turn over to Acts chapter 13. It's a little further right. The second half of the chapter, page 922.

We're no longer in Jerusalem, we're in Turkey. It's no longer the Apostle Peter, but it's the Apostle Paul. He's preaching the resurrection of Jesus again. Verse 34.

As for the fact that God raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, God has spoken this way, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.

[19:23] You is plural. This is an Old Testament quote from Isaiah. In other words, he's coming to his climax in his sermon, and the Apostle Paul says, all that was promised to David has come through the Christ and is for you.

I will give you God promises, you plural, the holy and sure blessings of David. Therefore, verse 35, he says in another psalm, then he quotes Psalm 16, you will not let your holy ones see corruption. And then he raises the problem for us. David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption. But he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

What's the point? Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, that through this man Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. And by him, by Jesus, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed under the law of Moses.

Isn't that brilliant? That means the deepest possible connection for us exists between us and the words of the Psalms because Jesus fulfilled the Psalms, because he died and rose, he rose again and offers us forgiveness for all who believe in him.

[20:43] And therefore, all the promises that God gave to David, that David revels in, even though he doesn't quite fulfill them, come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. I think this is great.

So let's go back to Psalm 16. If your faith is in Jesus, you read this Psalm from the inside.

You're inside Jesus Christ. We read it through Jesus Christ. You and I are members of Jesus' body. It's not just an example out there for us to try and live up to.

It's ours through our union with Jesus. He's fulfilled it. All the humanly impossible things, he's fulfilled, but they come to us through his life, through his risen life now.

So just go to the last part of the Psalm, those last three verses again. We now say these words with a whole different understanding because of Jesus Christ. Verse 9, Well, if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, all real hope for us is lost, isn't it?

[22 : 04] I mean, our bodies, if once we die, are going to remain forever under the power of corruption and decay if Jesus didn't fulfill this verse, because David didn't.

But because he is the firstborn from the dead, though we die and though our bodies will decay, he's promised not to leave us in the grave. This promise is now for us. We will be raised incorruptible with him.

If you listen to NPR or TED Talks, you will know there's great excitement right now about gene sequencing and how we believe we can now prolong human life.

I've listened to a lot of this stuff. Maybe because I'm getting old in the tooth. But, you know, at the very best, they think they can prolong life for five to six years.

And it's amazing. It's remarkable stuff, but it's only temporary. Apart from Christ, we will be swallowed into death. We need to think Christianly about our lives.

[23 : 06] We need to stop saying these things, you know, I've got my health. That's the greatest blessing. No, no. There's greater blessings to be had if you belong to Jesus Christ.

And I think we need to shift our affections. And that's what the psalm does for it. It shifts our affections. See verse 11? You make known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.

At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Now, the path of life isn't just for a few decades here. The path of life is the living union we have with the eternal Christ.

It begins now and it continues through death. And what that means is that in the presence of God is the fullness of joy and eternal happiness. These words of deep pleasure and satisfaction.

And in this life, all the best pleasures fade away. But what God has promised will truly satisfy. And by his Holy Spirit, he now gives us something of a taste of these things.

[24 : 08] The psalms, they fit David not so well. They fit Jesus perfectly. But they fit us in Jesus. And we come back to him again and again and again with the forgiveness and blessing that he offers us.

And I think we can say these words quite truly. We can say verse 2, I have no good apart from you. I have no good apart from him. We've seen the salvation that God has given us.

And though I stumble and fall and though you stumble and fall and sin, just as David did, Christ has taken our place. And he's removed the guilt. And he's removed the stain.

And he pours out the love of God into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. We know that everything that blocks the goodness of God in our lives, Jesus has taken from us.

We know that all our troubles in life come from this one thing. When we seek to have our happiness or our goodness outside of God, apart from God. And what we need to do is try and bring our hearts constantly to rest on his unchanging goodness.

[25 : 16] And how do we do that in conclusion? Well, how does it become a reality in our lives? I think it becomes a reality in our lives the same way it did for David. By prayer.

I know this is very, very obvious. But the Psalms are prayers. It's in prayer that our affections turn to God. It's in prayer that our affections move from being slow and dull to being strong.

Just the same. So it's not just we can say, I love Christ. But in prayer we begin to take joy in Christ. And it comes to us as we pray.

So here's the application. I'd like you to take Psalm 16 and pray it. Read it through. Pray it to God. And I don't think there's any better way for us to finish this sermon before Julie comes and prays with us than for us to just read it prayerfully now, quietly. So if you don't have it open, just look at your neighbour's copy.

[26 : 19] And as we go through, every word which touches our spiritual affections, we see in the Lord Jesus, we take delight in.

And we pray these words together. Psalm 16. Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord.

I have no good apart from you. As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply.

Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my heart.

The lions have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel.

[27 : 28] 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 shame.

For let your Holy One seek the ocean. You may guide me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand, my pleasures forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.