

Delighting In The Lord

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn this morning to the psalm that I read from just a little earlier on, from Psalm 16. And if you have a Bible, it'd be a good place to open it at that particular passage.

Great are you, Lord, greatly to be praised. Great is your power, and of your wisdom there is no end. You arouse us to delight in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. So begins Augustine's most famous work, *The Confessions*. It's a fascinating book that reveals how in Augustine's life, like many others, his life was a long search for happiness, for satisfaction, for pleasure.

But in the book, he acknowledges that before he came to faith in Jesus Christ, he had wasted much of his life looking in all the wrong places for that satisfaction. Now, the Psalms were, of course, written long before Augustine. But in so many of them, the language of delighting in God is very common. C.S. Lewis famously wrote, the most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance. And I think that's certainly true of Psalm 16. Because here is David delighting in God. Here is the Psalmist celebrating the fact that the Lord has become his supreme treasure and joy. Here David makes his own personal confession of all that he has discovered in God. In him he has found true rest and satisfaction. And that is, I think, one of the great hallmarks of biblical faith, resting and delighting in God. Conversion is simply the discovery that God is altogether lovely. Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian, wrote this, the sense of divine beauty is the first thing in the actual change made in the soul in true conversion, and is the foundation of everything belonging to that change. In other words, at the heart of authentic faith is love for and delight in the Lord. Now, I know Christianity has its rules and commandments and its responsibilities. That is clear. But these things do not lie at its center. At the heart of the Christian faith is a transforming relationship with the living God. The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question, what is the coming to life of the new man? And answers, it is wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to do. And that's what I think we see here in this great psalm of David. Here David tells us what he has discovered in God, in his relationship with God. He tells us what has so delighted him and thrilled his heart, what has given him joy and pleasure.

And I want to summarize the kind of teaching of the psalm under three headings. And the first is this, is that David delights in the Lord as his refuge. The Lord is my refuge.

[4 : 11] Preserve me, keep me safe, O God, the NIV puts it, for in you I take refuge. You are my Lord.

Apart from you, I have no good thing. The psalmist begins really with a prayer addressed to the one in whom he's found refuge. And really it's a prayer for protection. Keep me safe, preserve me, protect me.

He's asking the Lord to rescue him, to look after him, to be his safety. And a refuge is just that, it's a place of safety. And we live like the psalmist did. We live in a world of many dangers, toils, and snares. Often our lives appear to be at the mercy of forces that are way beyond our control.

And I think something of that uncomfortable reality has been underscored in these past months. And for many, their way of life has been turned upside down.

We like to think that we are the ones who are in control. We like to believe that we are in charge. Our politicians like to think it. We comfort ourselves that we are the masters of our own destiny. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's an illusion. An illusion that is sometimes brutally exploded by our experience of life.

[5 : 49] No one knows what tomorrow will bring. None of us can predict what slings and arrows of outrageous fortune may one day come our way. One moment, life can be like a beautiful, tranquil summer's day, not a cloud inside. The next we find ourselves caught up in the midst of some kind of

terrifying storm.

And at such times, of course, it exposes our need of a refuge, a hiding place, someone to be our help and strength, a foundation, a fixed point of reference. And the question is, where are we looking for that?

What are we tying our sense of security to? Where are we building our lives? On what kind of foundation? Where is our ultimate safety and security to be found?

David is looking to the Lord. He's trusting in God. God is his refuge and strength. God is his very present help in a time of trouble. This is his testimony. You are my Lord, I have no good, apart from you. What's he saying here? He's saying to God, you are my everything. You're my all in all.

With you, I have all I need. Without you, I have no good thing. You see, for David, there can be no security in this world apart from the living God. And this faith perspective utterly transforms, you see, his view of the world. As for the saints in the land, they are the glorious ones, the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight, verse 3. You see, because the Lord is his refuge, because the Lord is his everything, there are certain things that follow from that. And one is that he not only delights in God, he also delights in the Lord's people. The saints in the land are the people of God, the church. [7 : 54] He stands with them. That's one of the key marks of being a believer. We have a desire to be with the Lord's people, not out of a sense of duty, but a sense of delight. I was glad, says the psalmist, when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord. And it's a sign of a deep-seated spiritual malaise when believers no longer desire to be with other Christians. Biblical faith has, and always will have, a vital corporate dimension. We dare not forget it, even in these strange times.

I trust that this period where there is distancing and almost an enforced absence for many, is creating a growing desire to gather with the Lord's people as a congregation. We long for that day. Those who find the Lord as their refuge don't just view God's people differently. They also view the world differently. In verse 4, the sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.

I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. David sees the way of the world for what it is. Its emptiness, its futility are exposed.

Here are those who run after other gods, who follow the course of this world. And the picture here is one of human idolatry. Men and women careering down a road that leads nowhere, making their sacrifices and offerings to gods that cannot satisfy. And the psalmist simply says, that is a path I cannot take. Paul puts it in Romans 12, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Some of you will know that Martin Lloyd-Jones was one of the great preachers, I think, of the 20th century. And he came to genuine Christian faith as an adult.

[10 : 20] And then only after a long struggle, a long spiritual struggle. And at the height of this spiritual upheaval, he had an experience that changed his life and the direction of his life forever.

And he describes it with these words. One night, some friends wanted to go to a theatre in Leicester Square. They persuaded me to go with them. I have no idea what the play was about at all, but they were very excited about it. What I remember is this. As we came out of the theatre to the glare and glare of Leicester Square, suddenly a Salvation Army band came along playing some hymn tunes. And I knew that these were my people. I have never forgotten it. He goes on, there's a theme in Wagner's opera, Tannhauser, the two pools, the pool of the world and the chorus of the pilgrims, the contrast between the two. He says, I know exactly what that means.

I suppose I enjoyed the play, but when I heard this band and the hymns, I said, these are my people. These are the people I belong to, and I am going to belong to them.

Sometimes the church doesn't look like much. The world appears so much more attractive, so much more appealing, so much more interesting. But the eye of faith sees through the illusion.

[12 : 08] Those who know the Lord as their refuge see things differently. And they look to that motley crew of people singing, or at the moment not singing, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and say, these are my people. For the Lord is my refuge. The Lord is my refuge. And then secondly, the Lord is my satisfaction. Verses 5 through 7.

The language used in those verses conveys the idea of the Lord as the one who really satisfies his people.

Yahweh, the source of all good things. And you'll notice here that the Lord is his portion and cup.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. Verse 5. The idea here, I think, is that of daily provision. Literally, David says, Yahweh is my food and drink. The Lord sustains me, refreshes me each and

every day. He is my great provider. He is everything to me. John Calvin, the reformer, writes, None are taught a right in true godliness, but those who reckon God alone sufficient for their happiness. For he who has God as his portion is destitute of nothing, which is requisite to constitute a happy life. I wonder if we really see that today. Because we live in a world where men and women seek their portion and wealth and success and affirmation. But if you make those kinds of things your food and drink, they will leave you only hungry and thirsty. They do not. Indeed, they cannot satisfy. Because there is no ultimate satisfaction for the human soul to be found in anything but Yahweh himself, the living God. Spurgeon writes, There are griefs in life which wealth cannot alleviate, and there's the deep need of a dying hour for which no riches can provide. But when thou hast God for thy portion, thou hast more than all else put together. In him every want is met, whether in life or death.

With God for thy portion you are rich indeed, for he will supply your need. Comfort your heart, assuage your grief, guide your steps, be with you in the dark valley, and then take you home to enjoy him as your portion forever. What does the psalmist say in Psalm 73?

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. The Lord is my chosen portion, and the Lord is his true inheritance. The image the psalmist employs is all to do with property and land in verses 5 and 6. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. I have a beautiful inheritance. Land was very important, significant in ancient Israel.

[16:05] And the language of these verses may be drawn from perhaps a passage like Joshua 13. There we read of the various tribes of Israel being allotted to or a portion their inheritance in the land. And the final verse of that chapter reads like this, Joshua 13.33, the tribe of Levi, Moses gave no inheritance.

The Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, just as he said to them. The house of Levi alone was not given any land as an inheritance. It was said that the Lord God was their inheritance. Maybe that's what David is alluding to here. God himself is his beautiful inheritance. Some of you will know that in the New Testament, this kind of language is employed by the apostle Peter. He writes of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you. Here is the very wealth and riches of God himself, something that's utterly safe and secure, a treasure that cannot be stolen, that cannot be destroyed. Our destiny is to be with him, to be in his presence, to enjoy him forever.

And so the Lord is and always will be his people's true satisfaction. The Lord is my satisfaction, my portion. And also in verse 7, the Lord is his counselor.

Yahweh himself provides David with guidance and direction. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel in the night also. My heart instructs me. Verse 7, the Lord directs the heart of his servant David. He's not left on his own to wander and find his way through the maze of this life. He is a guide and a counselor who is always at his side.

And what a comfort that is for the believer, especially in testing days, challenging days, when there are choices, decisions to be made and to be taken.

[18:13] And how does the Lord give his counsel? I suppose the simple answer is that he provides it through his word. It's not through dreams or visions, special words of knowledge or impulses, through meditating and reading the word of God. It's how divine counsel and direction are imparted to us.

When David speaks of his heart instructing him in the night, I think the reference here is to his conscience, his deepest thoughts. The ideas of David pondering, reflecting upon Yahweh's word at night, cultivating the habit of reading and meditating upon Scripture has always been so vitally important for the Lord's people. Because this is how he shapes our thinking and our outlook and our perspective.

This is how he speaks into our hearts and shapes them for his good and for his glory. This is how he continues to satisfy us with good things.

The Lord is my refuge, says David. I delight in him. The Lord is my satisfaction. I delight in him. And then finally and thirdly here, the Lord is my hope, says David in verses 8 through 11.

I've set the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. I shall not be shaken. My heart is glad. My tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure. You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life. You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. What wonderful words of confidence

and hope they are. David has set the Lord always before him. What does that mean?

[20 : 18] Sometimes the theologians use a Latin phrase, *Coram Deo*, which literally means before the face of God. It conveys the idea of consciously living out one's life before the face of God. Actually, that's really the big idea of the Christian life.

It's challenging to think of it in this way. In other words, you know, we mustn't simply limit God to the religious arena. Lots of us like to do that. God is for Sundays, for church, religious events, but he's not for everyday life. And for many, even professing Christians, God can be shut away in a little religious box. It plays no real part in their day-to-day living. David says here, the Lord is always before me. I wonder if that's how you think. I wonder if that's how you live.

The Lord is always before me, at my work, in my home, amongst my friends, in my mind, even when I'm alone. You see, when you begin to think like this, it profoundly affects our conduct and behavior. Are you setting the Lord always before you?

And this way of thinking gives David great confidence. Verse 8, because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Because he knows that the Lord is with him, he knows that the Lord is always there. He will not be shaken, because despite what life may throw at him.

And what was true for David, I think is no less true for us. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. He is always at his people's right hand. In Jesus Christ, we discover this God who is always with us, always with us, even in difficult times. And so we are not shaken and destroyed.

[22 : 32] Ella, this year, a friend and colleague passed away with cancer. He and his wife, as they made that journey through the illness, and some of you will know who I'm talking about, they wrote a blog. And his wife wrote these words, I think on around about Easter time, on their blog. This is what she wrote.

As we have watched recent events, and as we reflect on our own journey, I often wonder what life would be like facing these evils without faith. The evils themselves are no different, whether you have faith or not. But how you read them and react to them is very different.

Over the past month, I've seen firsthand genuine fear in some of the most stable, got-it-together people I know. And over the past two years, some of you who do not have faith have expressed your admiration of how we've walked this journey because of our faith. All I would want to say is that faith doesn't change COVID or cancer, but faith does help you walk through the valley.

It connects you to the God who will be with you through every moment of it. Even when nobody else is with you, whether in hospital, in isolation, or in the dark, sleepless hours of the night, He is with you. That's what makes the difference.

Friends, here is a relationship that makes all the difference in the world. A relationship that time cannot exhaust, that circumstances cannot change, that disaster cannot destroy, that problems cannot crush, that failure cannot ruin. It's not even till death us do part. For nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Lord is indeed our hope in the face of death.

[25 : 02] And it's of this hope that the psalmist speaks. My heart is glad, verse 10. My whole being rejoices, my flesh dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your Holy One see corruption.

Friends, hope is so important as we seek to live our lives for God in this world. Makes all the difference, doesn't it? To have something to look forward to. To be confident of the future.

I was meant to go with friends earlier this year on holiday to play golf in Portugal. Holiday was arranged for May and then it was rearranged for November. It's of course cancelled.

But I was sent a video from, I suppose it's like the Portuguese tourist board, Visit Portugal. And the video was really nice. It closed with these words, It's time to dream of those amazing days to come. For when those days arrive, we will say again, Visit Portugal. That was the thing.

And the interesting thing about the video was its title, it was entitled this, Can't Skip Hope. Can't Skip Hope. Indeed we can't.

[26 : 31] Because without it, we will slide into cynicism and depression and despair. We live in a culture where there is unfortunately little sense of hope.

People have nothing to look forward to. Nothing beyond this life. This life is everything. No sense of anything beyond death.

But friends, David is not like that. He's not skipped hope. He's glad for he knows that even in death, even in shale, he will not be abandoned.

He's secure in God's hands. God is going to keep him. Body, mind and spirit, the everlasting arms will be around him. The Lord will not allow his favored one to experience corruption and decay. And in the New Testament, this verse of the psalm, verse 10, is taken, it's actually applied directly to the Lord Jesus by the apostles. Matthew Henry comments on this psalm, This psalm has something of David in it, but much more of Christ.

[27 : 42] Both Peter and Paul understood this psalm to be speaking of the resurrection of the Messiah. Jesus is the Holy One, the favored one of God, whose body did not see corruption.

Yahweh's favored one has conquered death and drawn its sting. He has triumphed over it, and because of that, all his people can enjoy that same assurance of victory. We will not be abandoned to shale.

Our flesh can dwell secure. And so into that dark place of fear and doubt shines the bright light of the resurrection. Fear of death is a reality for all human beings.

It can suck the hope out of people's hearts. I often quote the great Scots poem, I was taught it at school, of William Dunbar, called Lament for the Macker.

And it made a real impression upon me. I must have been about 13 or 14. It has a repeated refrain at the end of each stanza in Latin.

[28 : 47] The Latin phrase is this, Timur mortis conturbat me. Sin he has all my brother ta'en, he will not let me live alone. On forsa man, in this next prey be, Timur mortis conturbat me.

The fear of death troubles me. A great big long poem. Every stanza. The fear of death troubles me. And in our modern Western culture, death is something that people just do not want to hear about. They want to avoid it. The Observer newspaper some years ago wrote, Far from being prepared for death, modern society has made the very word almost unmentionable.

We have brought all our talents into use to avoid the prospect of dying. And when the time comes, we may react with anything from excessive triviality to total despair.

And confronted by our own mortality, many are driven to despair. Many skip hope. Many are troubled and cast down. But David the psalmist does not.

[29 : 59] You made known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. He has hope, he has confidence, he has faith.

Not in himself, but in Yahweh the living God. For here is the God who has held nothing back from us. Here is the God who has given himself for us.

In Jesus Christ, born for us. Lived for us. He died for us. He was raised again for us. In the psalm, David calls us to lean on him.

To delight ourselves in him. The Lord who is our refuge. The Lord who is our satisfaction. The Lord who is our hope. The great Dutch theologian Herman Baving wrote these words.

What gift is greater than God himself. What more can he give than himself? Himself with all his virtues and perfections.

[31 : 02] With his grace and wisdom. With his righteousness and omnipotence. With his immutability and faithfulness. Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.

Blessed indeed. Blessed. By God's grace, may David's confession in Psalm 16. Be ours as well. Let us delight in him.

In all that he is to us. And all that he's done for us. May we make the words of our closing song. Our own prayer.

O great God of highest heaven. Occupy my lowly heart. Own it all and reign supreme. Conquer every rebel power.

Let no vice or sin remain. That resists your holy war. You have loved and purchased me. Make me yours forevermore.

[32 : 28] Amen. Let's pray together. Lord you have made known to us the path of life. You have promised to fill us with joy in your presence.

And with eternal pleasures at your right hand. O Lord be to us our refuge and strength. Be to us the one who satisfies us.

And all our deepest needs. And be to us our hope. In the midst of a despairing world. Broken and fearful.

May our hope rest in you. The living God. The God who is for us. The God who has given himself for us.

The God who loves us. Who cares for us. Our God. Lord bless us.

[33 : 28] Encourage us and strengthen us. To live for you. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.
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