

Finding the Fullness of Joy

Psalm 16

The untimely passing of our dear brother in Christ this week causes every one of us to face some serious issues. How are we to live? What about aging, dying, death, and living forever? To answer these questions, it is so important that we find the answers in the Scriptures. How should we go about finding these?

Just one week ago, we gathered here to study Revelation 2:8-11 in our morning service, and Hebrews chapter 12 in our adult and teen Sunday schools. In Revelation 2:8, we learned that Christ proclaimed this about Himself: **“These things says the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive ...”**

As we studiedⁱ, “He is the God of the Resurrection, but much more; He is the Resurrected Lord. How could the Eternal God experience death? How could He know death intimately?

As we come to the time that we celebrate Christmas, we know the answer: Immanuel, “God with us” – God became a man. He did so **“...for the suffering of death...”** (Hebrews 2:9).

When we face death, we will already know that Jesus dove into death and came forth alive. Just as surely as you were terrified of the water until you learned to swim, you were once terrified by death. But when you came to know Christ – your Savior and “ultimate Lifeguard” – you came to understand the power of His resurrection.

Many of our folks are wrestling with Covid-19 right now. Many of you have faced crises where you did not know if you would emerge alive. But think about the way you learned to swim. If you were taught well, you were taught to put your face in the water and blow bubbles, or hold your nose to go under and come right back up. Then the day came when you could go off the diving board with the complete confidence that you would come back up out of the water. And so each one of these experiences with severe sickness, or even watching that passing of others, is a reminder of how Jesus went through death for us. And perhaps one day you may die and find your Lord and Lifeguard on the other side of your plunge into death. And in that moment you will know the power of the resurrection of the One who was dead and is alive! This is how you can live life facing death!”

Then, one week ago this morning, our Sunday School classes met to study Hebrews 12, including these words: **“But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than *that of Abel.*”** (Hebrews 12:22-24). And one of our teachers, Lane Ward, sat right there in the foyer with many of you and taught you from these words. And today, Lane is with those “righteous men made perfect” in Heaven.

So what did you think when you heard that Lane Ward had entered into heaven this past Wednesday afternoon? Which Scriptures came to mind?

Psalm 16 helps to give each one of us a Scriptural frame of reference with which to think about his death; it helps us to ponder the path of life. One commentator noted that in Psalm 16 “...full and substantial happiness consists in resting in God alone, who never suffers his own people to want any good thing.”ⁱⁱ So this psalm to be sung gives us a lens with which to look at life. In essence, Psalm 16 teaches us this: *Passing through life and into death, you must profess your dependence upon the Lord as your Divine Protector and Provider.*

This psalm can be divided into two parts: Verses 1-4 encourage us to place our full faith in the Lord. Verses 5-11 show us the blessed benefits of faithfully serving Him.

Place your full faith in the Lord

4 facets of saving faith

❖ **As your strong Protector, v.1**

“Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust” Why should the Lord preserve your soul through this passing life and passing into death? From the very first phrase, the psalmist, David, demonstrated the answer. He appealed to the Lord to preserve Him for this simple reason: he had embraced the Lord by faith. According to Romans 3:28, God justifies those who trust Him – meaning that He declares them to be righteous in His sight. Those who put their faith in the Lord will find Him to be their fortress of protection.

❖ **Because you have no personal goodness to offer to Him, v.2**

“O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extends not to Thee;” Have you confessed this before the Lord? The preacher in Ecclesiastes declared, **“For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not”** (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Have you come to saving faith, recognizing that **“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23)? Have you recognized your sinfulness – your lack of goodness before God – and called upon Him saying, **“You are my Lord!”**? Romans 10:9 assures you that if you will confess Jesus Christ as your Lord, believing that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

❖ **With all the excellent saints on earth, v.3**

“But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.”

Our recent Sunday school lessons on “the hall of faith” in Hebrews chapter 11 give us great reminders about these saints of God. God delights in His children. And the psalmist expresses his delight in these saints who act in an excellent manner. Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he prayed for the church at Philippi that they would **“approve things that are excellent”** (Philippians 1:10). When you come to know the Lord, you begin to delight in the Lord’s disciples. John wrote, **“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...”** (1 John 3:14).

❖ **By turning away from false gods, superstitions and their sorrows, v.4**

“Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.”

One prophet explained how the people of Israel turned away to follow other gods: **“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”** (Jeremiah 2:13). For 50 years, spilling the blood of 62 million babies, these United States have offered up blood like drink offerings. They believe they are godlike, but they are false gods. In the recent questioning before the Supreme Court, Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked about restricting abortions under *Roe v. Wade*, **“Will this institution survive the stench?”**ⁱⁱⁱ But what she should be asking – what all Americans should be asking – is whether this nation can survive as a stench in the nostrils of Almighty God. Our bloodletting is known to Him and He will rebuke and overturn a nation that casually murders its own children – who were made in the image of God.

Faithfully serve the One who blesses you with benefits

6 blessed benefits for the faithful

■ Choose to embrace the Lord who holds your destiny, your eternal inheritance, v.5-6

“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage.”

Those who turn from false gods to serve the true and living God will find that they have a rich, eternal inheritance in Him. This is why the Apostle Paul prayed that the local congregation at Ephesus would understand, “...**the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...**” (Ephesians 1:18). A surveyor of the time might have been heard to say about his newly acquired property, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yes I have a goodly heritage.” The story is told of a Texas rancher who invited a preacher to supper at his ranch. After supper, from his veranda, they looked out at the countryside, and the rancher said, “I own everything you can see in every direction!” So the preacher pointed to Heaven, and said, “How much do you own in that direction?” And the rancher hung his head. So I ask you today, “How much do you own in the heavenward direction? Have you laid up treasures in heaven?” If so, you can confidently say, “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places.”

■ Bless the Lord for the matchless, heart-warming counsel of His Word. v.7

“I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.”

One of the great blessings of knowing the Lord is that He counsels you with His Word. What do you think of the Scriptures? Does your Bible lie around unread and unused? When the psalmist testified of His faith in the Lord, he blessed the Lord who had given him advice and counsel from His Word. Even when he awakened in the night, the encouraging words of Scripture were still very much on his mind.

■ Set the Lord before your eyes, as the main mission of your life. v. 8

“I have set the LORD always before me...”

Here you see the psalmist’s commitment: “I have set the Lord always before me.” He is my goal, my mission, my chief end in life. As we read in our catechism: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Have you trusted the Lord with your life and made up your mind to pursue after Him?

■ Remember that the Lord is at your side to enable you. v. 8

“...because He *is* at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”

To say that the Lord “is at my right hand” is to speak of His enabling presence with you. As you and I seek to serve the Lord, we find that He is our companion. “We are not alone; God is with us” our choir has sung to us. The Lord Jesus and the Spirit of God accompany us, encourage us and groan with our griefs. And here is the blessed result: “I shall not be moved.” He gives us stability.

■ Find that your whole heart is made glad by the God of hope. v. 9

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also shall rest in hope.”

You will discover this blessed benefit of placing your faith in the Lord: your heart is glad. Your whole being will rejoice in Him. He will give you hope. This is why **“we sorrow not as others who have no hope”** (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

■ **You will not fear death but find the path to joyous eternal life. v. 10-11**

“For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fullness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.”

As we noted in the last message, many believe that Psalm 16:10 is a prophecy about the bodily Resurrection of Jesus from the dead: that the body of God’s Holy One would not be corrupted in the grave. But in a very real sense, all those who have trusted Christ are God’s holy ones – His saints in whom He delights. So the psalmist said, “You will show me the path of life.” Has God shown you the path of life? Our dear brother, who went to be with the Lord this week, trusted Christ as a young adult. The Lord showed Him the path of life – and he had been walking it for decades when he walked along that fence near the woods this last week. He had experienced the “fullness of joy” that this passage speaks of. And what do you think he is experiencing this very moment? **“At Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.”**

Place your faith in the Lord. Be faithful to Him and find the blessed benefits of being a believer.

The Path of Life, a paraphrase of Psalm 16, The Faithful Servant Psalm, *Dedicated to the memory of Lane Alan Ward*

*Preserve me, God, my refuge strong, I have no good apart from You.
My soul proclaims, “You are my Lord,” for Christ has paid what I was due
As for the saints in all the earth who honor Him, the Lord of light,
Their excellence, their willing hearts, their grace and love are my delight
The wicked follow idols dark that have no life, no light, no sense
My chosen portion is the Lord, my pleasant, rich inheritance
I bless the Lord who counsels me and in the night, my heart reproves
I set the Lord before my face, unshaken, I shall not be moved
With all my glory, I am glad secure in victory You have won
For You will not abandon me in Christ, I am Your holy one
Your grace shows me the path of life, Your joyous Presence more and more
At your right hand, O Lord my God, Your pleasures last forevermore!*

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ⁱ Living Life Facing Death, accessed at <https://www.cbcbfindlay.org/living-life-facing-death/>

ⁱⁱ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 215.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jonathan Turley, “What’s That You Smell in the Supreme Court?” citing Justice Sotomayor, The Hill, 12/02/21, accessed at <https://thehill.com/opinion/judiciary/583971-whats-that-you-smell-in-the-supreme-court>