

## **Psalm 16: God our Good**

### **OUTLINE**

God as our good  
God makes other things good  
Some other goods we have in God  
God our good in Christ

### **INTRODUCTION**

When all is being shaken you need something unshakable to hold on to to keep you from falling apart; when all things temporary are slipping away you need an eternal anchor. Psalm 16 is a psalm of David where his world is crumbling, things are going as badly as they can go and yet he finds his good and comfort in the unshakable God. David in this psalm is a refugee fleeing from Saul. Now when we think of refugees the picture we have in our minds is one of poverty, filth, devastation, rape, women and children, refugee camps where medicine is in short supply, cholera and other epidemics break out, and the wars that have caused this large exodus of people. Refugees are people to pity, people who have nothing, they have no homeland, no resources, no hope, no possessions, they are displaced among strangers and a strain on good will. Their lives are marked by survival, and not certainty, depression and not joy, however this is not David's experience when he is a refugee. How do we know David is a refugee? There are certain clues in the text. Firstly, his prayer for protection in v1 indicates a time when he would have been in danger, most likely when fleeing from Absalom or Saul. The reference to not worshipping idols in v4 remind us of some of the things that were said to David when he was fleeing from Saul around the time he entered Philistia for just over a year, after he spared Saul in his sleep, listen to his words, 1 Samuel 26:17-20 (ESV) Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." [18] And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? [19] Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' [20] Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains." The dig in saying to David to go and serve other gods is refuted in Ps 16:4. And thirdly, given David's nostalgic references to the saints in the land in v3, this would fit well with the situation we find David in, in 1 Samuel 27 when he is amongst the Philistines. So David then is a refugee, away from home, on the run, his wife has been taken from him, his friends have turned against him, things seem bad, how is he doing spiritually? This Psalm reflects how David finds his good in God.

As we reflect on this psalm we will be looking at four things: Firstly, that God is our good; how God makes other things good; the other goods we have in God, and finally God our good in Christ.

### **God our good**

In verse 1 we see that David has taken refuge in God. Walled cities were ones best defence against an invading army in David's day, and David makes God his walled city. Walled cities could either keep you safe, or end up killing you as you were starved out, or betrayed, or overcome due to poor defences. David finds that God is an abundantly stocked,

indestructible, treasure trove of a refuge, lets reflect on the good he says that he has in God in this psalm.

Verse 2 is perhaps one of the most profound verses that we will ever find in the whole Bible, and more so since we find it on the lips of one who is a refugee, 'I said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord, apart from you I have no good thing'. Several implications jump out from this statement. Firstly, much like Job's wife had said to Job, 'curse God and die', David had been told, 'go serve other gods'. The implication was, 'God has abandoned you, He is punishing you, why don't you go find yourself a god who will help you, because the one you have certainly doesn't appear to be doing so.' David was down and out and on the run, but in the midst of the temptation to forget God's goodness, and run off to other gods, this verse highlights David pledging his faithfulness to God, just like Job. This verse then ranks alongside Job's words, 'Though He slay me I will praise Him', it is a tremendous statement of faith.

Secondly, this verse speaks of where David's treasure lies. God is David's ultimate good. As long as David has God he has enough. As the Puritans pointed out, if you go to heaven and God is not there, it is no longer heaven, and no longer good. Here we find the spirit as we find on other earth shattering verse, Psalm 73:25 (ESV) "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." Here is our deepest lesson. David has lost all, has been stripped of all, he in dire straits, in a strange land, and yet he is able to confess God as his sufficient and only good. Please note that there is only one request in this whole psalm v1, the rest is a meditation on the good David has in God.

David has declared all his loyalty to God, 'You are my Lord,' but he is saying more than that. A bodyguard can be loyal to death, but David is declaring that God is all his joy and delight. Thirdly, when we do have God, in having Him as our God He will exercise His love, protection, guidance, and provision for us. Having God on your side, even only God, means that you have the majority on your side. In many ways the rest of the psalm is merely a thinking through the benefits of what it means that God is our good.

David in thinking about the good that he has in having God as his God, reflects on the opposite side of that thought as well; on how unhappy those are who don't have God and have followed idols. '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.' (v4). Most of human suffering can be put at this foot of this verse for explanation. All the suffering from Adam till the over throw of satan when Christ comes again can be seen as the consequence of not serving God, but taking an idol in His place. Whether it is the idol of our own thinking, a person, a possession, another religion etc. When we stop doing what we are made for and following the manufacturers instruction manual we break ourselves, our world and our relationships.

Please notice the nature of idolatry, not only is it the track to unhappiness because our hearts will only finally rest in God, but that it results in multiplying sorrows, unhappiness that compounds, wounds that add to themselves over and over. This is true for two main reasons. Firstly, the heart that seeks to find its satisfaction in things that are not God will inevitably have to go on and on trying to get more out of the idols they have replaced God with. If your idol is another person you will destroy yourself and that person as you make a god of them. If your idol is an experience you will ruin your health, finances relationships to multiply that experience. At the base of all addiction is a heart that is not satisfied in God and believes it will only find its happiness in something else. Secondly, once a person turns from God to idols, the judgement of God manifests itself in handing a person over to what they want. God removes His hand of restraint and their consciences that once bothered them will do so no more, any providential interventions that minimized consequences or prevented them from pursuing their sins will be removed, the hedge of protection from

temptation will be removed and satan's activity is allowed to increase. And so under God's judgement the sorrows of those who chase idols and do not worship God multiply.

### **God makes other things good**

Making God our good and our portion is the fight of faith. Our sinful inclinations that walk by sight and feel tempt us with other things as our good. We trend towards idolatry always attempting to replace the Creator with the created. The sinful heart is deceived and deceiving believing that its true happiness, purpose, satisfaction, and identity are found in things other than God. Here is David who has been stripped of all the many things that we would make our idols and he is reminding us that God is in fact our good.

Now many Christians have had an either/or mentality when it comes to making God our good. Because the sinful heart is always tempted to make other things ultimate in our lives we have seen a trend to an extreme rejection of the gifts of God's creation. Think of the history of asceticism in the church, think about the monks, the monasteries, the saints, the nuns and celibate priests, think of all those who have sought to make God their good by attempting to leave creation itself behind. Let me suggest to you that if God is your good, then other things can stop being gods and become good things. In other words, if God holds the first and proper place in our hearts then the rest of the gifts He seeks to lavish upon us as a generous Creator and Father can be received and enjoyed without them replacing Him. In other words, it is only those who have God as their good that can enjoy the gifts of creation as good things, but those who have made those good things their God, they have no good whatsoever and serve no god but are slaves. In other words, things like marriage, work, family, money, rest, recreation; these are all good things that can be enjoyed as gifts from God if God holds the proper place as our God in our lives.

How do you know whether something is an idol? If something makes you bad, mad, sad or glad it is your idol. If you break God's law to have it or pursue it, or serve it, it makes you bad and is placed higher than God in your life. If you turn on your loved ones, or even get angry at God Himself when the thing is removed, it holds your heart and your 'righteous anger' reveals your god. If it is taken away and you sink into depression and suicidal despair, then you were resting your dependence on it and not God, you looked to it for security, purpose, identity, etc, and now that it is gone you have no reason for living, not so for David who has all stripped away but has his all in God. If it is seen as your greatest happiness and you cannot be happy without it, then that is your idol. God is the only one who can sustain being our God, He alone is enough to satisfy the eternity in our hearts. All other gods become devils. He who has given His own Son in His love for you is the only God to have all others will use and abuse you.

### **Some other goods we have in God**

The rest of the psalm is a list of other good things that we have when God is our good. The psalm amounts to him counting his blessings as he seeks to buoy up his own faith and ours. David not only finds refreshing in God but in His people, 'As for the saints who are in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight' (v3). The word 'saints' means 'loyal' or 'godly ones' (Kidner). In their holiness David sees them as excellent/glorious/majestic, and because of them his soul is refreshed and he finds delight. How is this? Well, if we remember that David is possibly amongst the Philistines, who are living out their own destruction by following their idolatrous ways and not God's law. It is easy to understand how David would feel exhausted by them, repulsed by them, alone amongst them, and have no real fellowship or meeting of the mind with them. Christians

can't help but feel this day in and out as they rub shoulders with the people of the world. If a believer is feeding on the heavenly manna daily, face to face with God daily, thinking God's thoughts after him daily, seeking to conform themselves to His image daily, contact with those who are unbelievers, who are going in the opposite direction leaves one cold. Those who are sliding in their walks and focus in the Lord will not feel as uncomfortable, and will not express the same longing for God's people as David in this psalm. This does not mean that we should seal ourselves in a hermitage, no it means that we need extra support and encouragement, and we find this amongst God's people.

David found himself at ease, refreshed, encouraged and delighted by the people of God as they pursued holiness. David was describing his enjoyment of one of the means of grace to us, fellowship. He is articulating a love for the church and an earnest desire for it when he can't have it. He uses strong language, excellent, to describe them. When in a world that is hostile, with thousands around you committed to godless living, expressing their selfishness everyday. A believer finds encouragement in the reality of God's counter cultural people, a resonating unity with those who are swimming up stream. My fear is that many Christians do not have this perspective. My fear is that Christians are programmed by the world, and do not see the world as that bad. That 21st century, 1st world living, human rights driven, entertainment addicted, consumer oriented, feelings guided, Christ marginalising, sport idolising, sin relativizing culture feels like home and not hell. That the Church does not appear as a haven to find refreshment but a duty that gets in the way of other things. That the striving of other Christians to honour God in the beauty of holiness is not seen as glorious and majestic but rather as Puritan, self righteous, backward, narrow, etc. Too often I have found Christians viewing the Church from this point of view, the world's, and not David's. How do you view the Church? Is it your delight and refreshment, or do you get that somewhere else? Do you think the Church should be dressed in more wolves clothing and adopting more of the wolves ways, or do you rejoice in the counter cultural commitment to honour God? What you think of the Church reveals what principles you are programmed by.

The third set of consolations that David has are those relating to the hope of eternal life and heaven. Although David speaks in terms his 'inheritance', and his 'lot'. From the OT perspective when these truths were still in the swaddling clothes of physical types, they relate to the land of Israel. However, we now know that our inheritance is heaven, and that the Land was a physical type of the New heavens and the New earth. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." As Peter seeks to encourage the 'elect exiles of the dispersion', in other words, exiles. He reminds them of the amazing inheritance that awaits them. And tells them that it is imperishable, that is it cannot rust or die or be removed by war or natural disasters. That it is undefiled, in other words it will not have satan sin or death present, and that it is unfading, that is perfect forever. And so in light of this amazing future we are able to rejoice as Peter goes on to say in 1 Peter 1:6 (ESV) "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,".

David found himself away from home and lifted by the thought of his return there, we too find ourselves away from home and lifted in the thought of going there. Our joy certainly outstrips any earthly anticipation that David had. However, we must not think that David was merely homesick and comforted by a mere earthly prospect his mind was also on

eternal and heavenly things, 2 are presented in the final verses of the psalm. Firstly, we see his hope in a resurrection, 'You will not abandon me to the grave, nor allow your Holy One to see decay.' David like Job believed that death would not be the final victor. He had no idea exactly how God was going to defeat death though. He never could have conceived of God becoming man, living 33 years amongst us, and allowing us to kill Him as if He were a criminal to pay our sin debt, only to be raised from the dead as a prototype for all other believers who would put their faith in Him. That in His death and resurrection we would receive life and a resurrection body that could never die like His. David had an inkling, but we have the full story. This gave David confidence, how much more so ourselves. As we look down through the history of the Church we see that this is how Christians have been able to die good deaths, martyrs gladly died, and many found hope in the midst of this worlds worst trials.

Secondly, we see David looking forward to heaven and being in God's direct presence, a time when all the veils of separation will be removed. Sin, death, satan, finite bodies, and we will be in His presence drowning in perpetual bliss and everlasting joy. Notice as well, the recognition of grace in this affirmation, 'You have made known to me the path of life, You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand'. Who put David on the path of life, who will make sure he gets to heaven, who lavishes his eternal treasures upon us? Only God, by His grace. He takes sinners who are undeserving and saves them to the uttermost. Although we may be refugees surrounded by enemies we are able to say with David, 'Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices'. This is understatement for what we should be feeling. Because of God's grace and because of Christ we are rich. We have God, the Church and an inheritance, and we have God, God, God. If apart from Him we have no good thing, what do we have if we have Him? Consider this as you reread this portion and reflect on what provisions your faithful Father has sent on your journey through this wicked world with.

### **God our good in Christ**

Now as we read through that psalm I am guessing that many of you recognised verse 10, 'For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.' We know that both Peter and Paul appealed to this verse in their preaching to show that it was prophesied that the Messiah must rise from the dead. In other words, this is a messianic psalm. This should give you new ears as you listen to this psalm. The promises should be heard as being given from the Father to the Son, the security of the promises are not unsure but as sure as the Father's love for His Son and as sure as the Son's holy obedience and triumph. The fulfilment of the promises is nothing less than the portion given to the Son, and here is where we begin on finally get a grasp in the dimensions of God's goodness to us. We are in Christ, we are His body, we are His bride, the inheritance that the Father gives to the son is the inheritance that we will have a portion in, the resurrection that Christ was resurrected from the dead with, is the same resurrection that awaits us, the commitment of the Father to fulfil all these things for His own Son is the same commitment that the Father has to us. We can say those words of David with fresh meaning, 'I have no good apart from you' for we are not apart from Him but united to Him and in Him receive God's greatest gifts.

Is God your good? Have you been serving false gods, idols, tyrants? Have you tasted the emptiness of serving sin and know that there is nothing in creation that can satisfy you? Can you see the great sin and error you have committed, that God has made you for Himself and you have given your love to a nothing and served that which is not worthy of service and have slighted the one who is all loving and all majestic, the only one worthy of all our devotion. God has made a way for you to return to Him, He has sent His Son to take the

punishment for your idolatry and to grant you an amnesty and an opportunity to be restored to your created purpose, to find your true joy and happiness in His service and worship. Christian have you forgotten that God is your good? Have you allowed His gifts to draw you away from Him? Here is David stripped of all worldly goods who has rediscovered that God is his only good apart from whom he has no good thing. Do you know this today; are you living out of this truth when heartache, tragedy or temptation comes? This is the only sustenance that can sustain us as we go through the wilderness of this life.