

This Psalm is about security and contentment in God. David is describing his own experience, but as a Psalm it is intended for the instruction and encouragement of others. As a Psalm it is intended to be sung or prayed by others as a way of putting their own experience with God into words. But it is also intended to show others the way to a life of security and contentment in God. The Psalms are a tremendous resource to help us to express our own feelings and experiences in private or public worship, but they also are full of instruction for us about living the life of a believer in God.

Many of the Psalms have a lot to do with troubles that the Psalmist is facing. In this Psalm there is an awareness of danger, but when David was writing this Psalm he was in a secure place and he was filled with joy that had everything to do with his relationship with God. So as we work our way through Psalm we will look at it as a celebration of how good it is to have God as our God, but also a call and an invitation for us to enter more fully into that goodness.

In the first words of the Psalm David expresses his awareness of the danger that surrounds even the most tranquil of lives. "Preserve me, O God..." At the moment he is secure, but he is not cocky or presumptuous about his security. He realizes that he cannot guarantee his own safety even for a moment.

Here he is showing himself to be unlike the wicked who are full of self-confidence. Psalm 10:6 describes the arrogance of the wicked, "He says in his heart, 'I shall not be moved; throughout all generations I shall not meet adversity.'" There are times, at least, when the wicked feel very secure and confident in their own resources to deal with whatever comes along. Obviously the wicked do not always feel that way. Many of those who feel that they do not need God in their lives, feel fearful and vulnerable. But some of the wicked, can feel very secure and feel that they have the power and the smarts to deal with whatever comes their way.

But David does not face life with that self-confident attitude. He asks God to preserve him because he knows that he himself is not sufficient to deal with any challenge that may come his way and he realizes that he is vulnerable to all kinds of things that are completely outside of his control. And that is in line with biblical wisdom. Proverbs 27:1 teaches us, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring."

Bible does not tell us to be anxious about tomorrow or the more distant future, but neither does it tell us to feel that we in ourselves are indestructible and secure on the basis on our own resources. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. And so we are not to boast about tomorrow. James addresses this reality in James 4:14-15 "[You] do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"

David understood this and that is why he begins, in this Psalm, "Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge." David understood his own weakness and vulnerability but instead of looking to his own resources he took

refuge in God. That is - he looked to his God to be his protector. He asked the Lord to preserve him and take care of him. And that is how we are to look at life as well. We are weak and vulnerable. God is our God and able to keep us safe and secure. And so we pray – “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.”

Then in verse 2 he continues and says, “I say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.’” What he means here is that every good thing in his life comes from God. He knows that. He confesses that. He celebrates that.

This is a wonderful truth that is true for every one of God’s people. Every good thing in our lives comes from God. Nothing good in our lives comes from any other source. God may use our own work or strength or intelligence to bring us good things. He may use what appear to be coincidences to bring us good things. He may use the kindness of other people. The good things in our lives come from all kinds of places, but David understands that every good thing in our lives ultimately comes from God.

Now David does not here talk about the hard things in his life. We know from his story and many of the other Psalms that he wrote that he had plenty of hardships in his life. The fact that here he asks the Lord to preserve him means that he knows that he is vulnerable to pain and disasters. But that is not what he is thinking about in this Psalm. When he wrote this Psalm he seemed to be in a happy place.

Now there are a great variety of ways God in his providence orders the lives of his people. Some people have really hard lives. Psalm 88 describes a life of a godly person which was filled with pain and suffering. But there are many of God’s people who are blessed with relatively pleasant lives. There will always be periods of difficulty in one way or another. As we age we will inevitably experience the loss of loved ones and the weakening of our own bodies. But it is wonderful to confess with David here, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” And it is wonderful when God does give us times in our lives when we are overwhelmed with thanksgiving at the many and wonderful blessings that the Lord has given to us.

And one of the choicest good things that God gives his people is other people of God. Verse 3 “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.” Saints means “holy ones.” The NT uses the word in the same way. Saints are regular people of God. The term in the Bible does not mean “super saints” but regular people of God. Regular people of God are at many different places as far as their spiritual maturity is concerned, but they are all saints in the sense that they are set apart by God and for God. In NT language, they are saved people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ and who are being changed towards Christlikeness. They may be mature or immature. They may be weaker or stronger. But they are all seeking to live according to the commandments of God.

David here in Psalm 16 says that he delights in the saints of the land. This is a huge part of his sense of wellbeing. He delights in other people of God. His life is greatly enriched by his relationships with other faithful

believers. This is a huge emphasis in the Bible – that fullness of life involves both delight in God and delight in God’s people.

Delighting in God and delighting in his people are closely related because the people of God, to some extent, reflect the character of God. Colossians 3:10 says that all believers are “being renewed in knowledge after the image of [their] creator.” So if we delight in the character of God, we will also delight in the people who reflect the character of God in their lives. Of course, there is an extra challenge when it comes to delighting in the people of God because unlike God, they are not perfect, but they are being renewed in God’s image so loving God and loving his people belong together.

The NT does not use the word “delight” in the sense of believers in Christ delighting in one another. The word it uses most often is “love.” Believers love one another. Love includes delight but it includes much more. Love is a desire for the wellbeing of one another. But it certainly includes delight. The NT also uses the term “brotherly love” to refer to the relationships between believers. That is based on a different Greek word. For instance, in Romans 12:10, Paul exhorts believers, “Love one another with brotherly affection.” Paul also uses other terms to convey the idea that he delighted in his fellow believers. For instance, in Romans 14:23 he speaks of coming among the Roman church “with joy” and being “refreshed in [their] company.”

So David in Psalm 16 sings of his delight in the saints in the land. God grants his people many good things, and one of the greatest is the delightful fellowship with God’s people. And is that not a gift worth singing about? The greatest good that God gives us is a relationship with himself through salvation in Jesus. Closely related to that is the delight of loving and being loved by the people of God. And after that comes everything else – prosperity, health, comforts, and pleasures. What an encouragement for us to give ourselves to the enjoyment of the fellowship with God’s people! “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is my delight.”

Verse 4 gives a contrast. The Psalm as a whole is making the point that wellbeing is found in God and his people. Verse 4 gives the contrast. “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.” David speaking about the worship of false gods. He says that the sorrows of those who worship false gods shall be multiplied. He does not mean that the worshipers of the true God have no sorrows. One of the biggest categories in the Psalms are the psalms of lament. The Bible has a great deal of teaching concerning the sorrows of God’s people. But there is a massive difference between the sorrow of God’s people and the sorrows of those who worship false gods.

The sorrow of God’s people is a sorrow mitigated by hope. The sorrow of the wicked is a sorrow intensified by despair. David has something profound to say about the sorrows of God’s people in Psalm 30:5. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” The sorrow of God’s people will be turned to joy. No matter how difficult the road is for God’s people, they are heading towards joy – in part in this life – in its fullness after this life.

“The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply.” The worship of other gods leads to emptiness and death. It leads to the judgment of the true God. It leads to emptiness and futility because false gods cannot bring the kind of joy that is only found in the true God. There may be some kind of temporary and superficial happiness, but not the joy that is only found in the true God.

According to Psalm 1, the wicked “are like the chaff that the wind drives away.” Asaph in Psalm 73 struggled with the prosperity of the wicked, until he “went into the sanctuary of God.” “Then [he] discerned their end.” In verse 27 he says, “For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.”

David is telling us that the way of worshipping idols is the way of sorrow. For us the temptation of idols is not the temptation of worshipping some image, but the temptation of worshipping some aspect of the creation rather than the creator. It is living for something other than God – like comfort or pleasure or money or our reputation. The sorrows of those who worship these gods shall multiply. It is the way of emptiness and death. It is the way of shriveling souls. David commits himself not to worship idols. “Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.” He understands that the way of idols is the way of death and the contentment and security he is speaking about in this Psalm are rooted in God. And so he is warning us away from other gods and encouraging us in the worship and service of the true God.

In verse 5 he focuses on God. “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.” “The LORD is my chosen portion.” The word “portion” here refers to a part of a whole – like a portion of a pie. David is saying – out of everything that I could choose, I choose the LORD. There are a lot of small “g” gods I could choose, but I choose the LORD as my God. Asaph in Psalm 73 helps us to understand the significance of this saying – “The LORD is my chosen portion.” Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” When David says, “The LORD is my chosen portion,” he is saying that there is nothing on earth that he desires more than God.

David also calls the LORD his “cup.” The cup is a symbol for what is inside of it. It can be a cup of blessing or it can be a cup of wrath. Psalm 23:5 says, “my cup overflows.” The symbol is of a cup overflowing with blessings. One author writes, “A cup may hold a blessing-liquid that sustains life, quenches thirst, engenders fellowship....” In Psalm 16:5 David is saying that the LORD himself is his cup from which all his blessings come. About this image John Piper writes, “Nothing satisfies – nothing nourishes and sustains – the way he does. He is my greatest good. My treasure of all treasures. My highest pleasure. My chosen portion of sirloin. My cup of finest wine.”

This is an important part of contentment and security and wellbeing as the Bible describes it – having God as our portion and our cup – for us the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Having God as our God – having Jesus as our Saviour and Lord – is at the heart of all true wellbeing and security. Anyone who can say,

“The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup” has everything they need for joy, for contentment, for wellbeing and for security. In Philippians 4:11 & 13 Paul writes, “for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ... I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

In Romans 8:39, Paul says that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

That is what David is getting at when he says, “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup.” I choose the LORD to love and worship and trust and it is well with my soul.

David also says to his God “You hold my lot.” The term “lot” here refers to the allotment of the land that each family received from the Lord when the Lord gave them the promised land. The land was divided up and each family received their share of the land. Here David is saying that the Lord holds his share of the land. It is a way of referring to the circumstances of his life. David knew that God was in control of the circumstances in his life.

And that the moment at least those circumstances were pleasant. Verse 6. “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.” This again refers to David’s allotment in the land and metaphorically to the circumstances of his life. When he wrote this psalm, at least, he was in a good place. He was content and secure and that contentment and security were rooted in God.

Now in life we are not always in the same place as far as our circumstances are concerned. Over the course of one’s life, there will be more pleasant times and more difficult times. And there will be times when we look around us and be amazed at how the Lord has blessed us. But even in harder times our situation in life is infinitely better than an unbeliever who has much in the way of this-worldly blessings. The OT idea of inheritance is transformed in the NT to refer to salvation in Christ. In the OT the inheritance was the portion of the land that each family received. In the NT that idea refers to the salvation that Jesus has obtained for us.

Ephesians 1:18 speaks of “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” 1 Peter 1:4 speaks of an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you....” And that is why we have a beautiful inheritance even in the times when we are experience difficulty. It is why Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to “give thanks in all circumstances.” Certainly it is wonderful when we can look around us at our lives be overwhelmed by the this-worldly blessings that God grants us. But what is far more of a blessing is the eternal inheritance that is ours as believers in Jesus Christ.

The next thing that David mentions in his meditation on how God is blessing him in his life is God’s counsel and instruction. Verse 7, “I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.” Counsel and instruction are a big deal in life. God has so designed our lives that we need to make decisions and those decisions will affect our lives for good or for ill. Even though God’s providence directs our lives within that reality are the choices that we make. Our lives are meaningful because we make real choices that make a great difference in our lives. Bad decisions can lead to disaster. Good and wise decisions are necessary

for a wellbeing and security. And in the light of that reality David blesses the LORD who gives him counsel and instruction.

At the heart of that is the Word of God – the Bible. But God also gives wisdom and instruction through experience and through the advice of others – particularly the people of God. Paul says that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ. (Colossians 2:3) In his Word and by his Spirit God gives his people all the wisdom and knowledge that they need to flourish in this life. Both contentment and security are very much influenced by wisdom and God grants counsel and instruction to his people.

And so David is secure. At the beginning he has asked God to preserve him. In verse 8 he speaks of how secure he is because God is at his right hand. “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.” There is no greater security than the security that we have in God.

And the next few verses of this Psalm point us to the ultimate reason that we are so secure in God. And that is the resurrection from the dead. Verse 9-10, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul in Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” The NT teaches that these verses are fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits of the resurrection of all of his people. And so what David wrote here applied to himself. It applies to Jesus’ resurrection and it applies to our resurrection.

We are secure because the Lord will not abandon our souls to the grave – that is the meaning of Sheol. It refers to the realm of the dead. It refers to the grave. Those who believe in Jesus will not be abandoned by God in their graves because he will raise us from the dead. And that is reason for great joy and gladness. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:52 “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

This is the ultimate security. Jesus Christ has conquered death by his life and death and resurrection and he has assured us in John 6:40, “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believe in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” That is the ultimate in wellbeing and security. And although David only had a glimmer of this, he could sing, “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 one see corruption.”

And the final verse summarizes the biblical teaching on joy both in this life and in the life to come. 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.”

This is at the heart of the contentment and security of which this Psalm speaks. David as been describing the path of life. It is the path of having the Lord as our Lord and having his people as our people. It is the path of choosing the LORD as our portion and our cup. It is the path of living according to the counsel and instruction

of the Lord and always setting the Lord before us. It is the path of living in the light of the hope of the resurrection.

And the key to everything – to all contentment and security are these last words of this Psalm – “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” The most profound joy that we can know is found in the enjoyment of God – the enjoyment of worship and beholding his beauty – the enjoyment of his love and delight in us in Jesus – the enjoyment of living for the most worthwhile end – the glory of God and so much more. And all of that is possible for us fallen sinners because of what Jesus has done for us.

Jesus has come and given his life so that we might have abundant life in the presence of God. Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence of God in the garden of Eden, but when they fell into rebellion against God, they were banished from the garden and the presence of God. Jesus came and gave his life so that we might be reconciled to God and once again know the joy of his presence.

In this Psalm, David warns of the sorrows of those who run after another god. But the rest of the Psalm is a celebration of the path of life that comes from running after the true God. Let us celebrate. Let us be grateful. Let us seek to enter more fully into the experience of joy in God by living the God-centered life that is so wonderfully expressed in this Psalm.

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”