

I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN

*"I have set the Lord always before me,
Because He is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken." (Psalm 16:8)*

Psalm 16 A Miktam of David

Keep me safe, O God,
for in you I take refuge.
I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."

As for the pagan priests who are in the land
and the nobles in whom all delight, I said:
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.

Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

"I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I have set the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken."

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because 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.

Message:

This beautiful Psalm of David's is a vivid testimony to the power of faith during a time of trial. David is threatened with death by some enemy. Perhaps it was Saul who in his madness repeatedly tried to kill David. Maybe it was his own son Absalom who raised up a rebellion against David. In any case although his life is threatened, David not only feels assured of God's protection, he actually rejoices in his situation, knowing that His Lord will deliver him. Will you pray with me? [Father in heaven, teach us through the Psalmist to have great faith so that we may rest secure in our present troubles, knowing that your divine will is always at work in our lives to bring blessings out of tribulation. Amen.]

This will be an expository sermon on Psalm 16 and I invite you to follow along in your bulletins. David begins:

*Keep me safe, O God,
for in you I take refuge.
I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing." (Psalm 16:1-2)*

The first thing David does is to go in prayer to God—his only source of safety and help. Why not? God asks us to and as I heard a disgruntled ex-Catholic once say, “If you have a direct line to the CEO, why talk to His secretary—let alone his mother?” David, a man after the Lord’s own heart, always set his bearings by the light of his lodestar: his father in heaven. He seemed to understand that when we are in a difficult situation, we have a fatal tendency to chart our course by taking our bearings from the nearest visible landmarks rather than basing it on a reliable outside referent. Like a person lost in a forest trying to walk out by taking the path of least resistance rather than by following his compass. Or a sailor lost at sea allowing the wind and the currents to take his ship wherever they will, rather than navigating by the north star. As silly as it may sound, this path of least resistance can be quite appealing, for as the Cheshire Cat said to Alice: “If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there.” If you don’t have an external referent—a lodestar—you will be guided by the nearest landmarks you can see.

In verses three and four, David dispenses with the value of such sources of direction:

*As for the pagan priests who are in the land
and the nobles in whom all delight, I said:
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. (Psalm 16:3-4)*

All points of reference, all other guideposts than God Himself, are worthless: they are false guides which draw us further and further away from our real source of help. Their names are not even known to God. Like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, they are blind guides and the instruction they provide is poisonous. There is only one point of reference, one lodestar, which will guide us faithfully and deliver us into safety, and that is God in heaven. David continues:

*Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance. (Psalm 16:5-6)*

Having gone to his Father in prayer, David is confident both of both his position and his direction: he knows where he is and he knows where he is going. His position is secure and God will lead him in the direction he needs to take. His words illustrate one of the greatest benefits of faith: the assurance that after we have prayed to God about our situation, our situation becomes God’s concern: He will protect us and give us direction. This gives us peace—freedom from worry and anxiety over the future. This is the “peace that passes understanding” that Paul describes in his *Letter to the Philippians (Phil. 4:7)* It is a peace we all want to have yet find so elusive **because we keep looking for it in our circumstances rather than in our relationship with God.** Christian peace comes with the realization that God has assigned each one of us our portion and our cup: our share of blessing and our cup of suffering. This realization permits us to rejoice in our

blessings without feeling guilty for being “better off” than others. More importantly, it helps us endure suffering by assuring us that if we trust Him to, God will work good out of everything that comes our way—even our suffering. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome, *“We know that IN ALL THINGS God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)*

God is a provident God, a loving Father who knows how much encouragement we need and how much humbling we require. Both blessing and woe will be for our own good and this knowledge enables us to say along with David even in difficult times, *“The boundary lines for me have fallen in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”* David continues:

*“I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.
I have set the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.” (Psalm 16:7-8)*

We, like David, can praise God in all circumstances—even in times of hardship, knowing that He is watching us with an unblinking eye. But God does much more than merely watch us: He **lives** in us. In the ancient Hebrew way of speaking, He knows us and walks with us. Someone once said, *“God, who directs the electrons in their orbits around the atoms in the rings of Saturn—this same God has invited us to call him Abba Father.”* And as we do He instructs our hearts *even at night when we are asleep!* Knowing this, we can “take heart” and feel encouraged even in the worst of times, knowing that God will use even adversity to work good our lives. As a side note, that kind of bearing up with joy during times of trial is the most powerful witness we can give for our faith.

The author of Hebrews writes: *“Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:7, 11-13)* Do you realize what these words are saying? They are telling us that no hardship, no suffering which we endure as believers need be worthless—that if we trust Him, God will bring peace and joy out of our suffering. In the words of the Psalmist: *“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” (Psalm 126:5-6)* The suffering of the faithful can be fertile soil for raising up a harvest of peace and righteousness. As a side note: it can produce the most powerful witness to a Christian faith a person can give. When a person can exhibit joy during a time of tribulation, people take notice.

But now comes the most breathtaking promise of all:

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (Psalm 16:9-10)

David’s God—our God—not only guides and protects us during our journey through this vale of tears, at the end of our journey He translates us into his presence in heaven where we will dwell with Him forever. Peter declares that in these words David prophesied the death and resurrection of Christ, but they are also God’s Easter promise to you and me that we too will rise up after we leave this earth behind and dwell with God in glory! Paul

expresses this thought when he calls Christ, *"...the firstborn among many brothers."* (Romans 8:29)

David received a promise from the Lord that one of his descendants would rule over God's people forever. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David and the Son of God, who came as the suffering servant of Yahweh to assume responsibility for all the sins of the world and atone for them on the cross. This is the Gospel: that *"God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son to die for us, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

And so we come to the conclusion of the Psalm:

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. (Psalm 16:11)

The path of life! Before Christianity was called "Christianity" it was called "the Way" which meant "the way of salvation" or the path of life. It is no ordinary pathway! It is not a roadmap or a set of signposts. It is not a list of instructions, like the Koran or the Bhagavad-Gita or the sayings of Confucius. The path of life is not a "what" but a "Who"—Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, the Word made flesh, our Savior Who came from God to lead us back TO God so that we might have eternal pleasures at His right hand.

Amen.