



Choosing Between Life and Death

Psalm 16 | April 19, 2020

English Translation for Rev. Jeremiah Cheung

Under what circumstances did David pen Psalm 16? We do not know because the Bible is silent on this. In its heading, Psalm 16 is referred to as a *'miktam'* of David. The Chinese translation refers to a *'miktam'* as a 'golden' psalm. Gold is used to represent precious and valuable things, but in Hebrew, this word means to write something down in black and white. When you combine these two meanings, we begin to understand David's purpose in writing the Psalm. He had lived through a precious and valuable experience and he felt compelled to record it in black and white. What experience was this? Was it Saul's pursuit to kill him? Was it Absalom's rebellion? Was it when the Philistines attacked him? We don't know, but from this psalm we can be certain that David had gone through a dangerous, perilous time.

V.1 "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge." David was in a crisis; he sought refuge in God and asked God to keep him safe. What does the term "refuge" mean? It refers to a place where one can hide from danger. Japan is a country that experiences earthquakes frequently. When an earthquake occurs, the Japanese know where to go: they seek refuge in places like their community centers because these buildings are the strongest. However, when there is no earthquake, they would not intentionally go to these locations. And so it is with David; he sought refuge in the Lord because he was facing adversity.

V. 7 "I will praise the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me." The original meaning of the phrase "my heart" in this line actually means "my kidney" – a phrase used to represent our internal organs, which in turn represent the whole person.

Why did David say "my heart instructs me" at night? Does your kidney talk to you? If you say no, I thank God for you because when our organs 'talk' to us, we have a problem. We often take many things for granted. For example, it's only when we have a toothache that we pay attention to our teeth. It's when we have kidney pain that we pay attention to our kidneys. Therefore, whenever our internal organs start 'talking' to us, we know we are facing a problem that is already severe. David said that his heart also instructs him at night because something was already terribly wrong with his body.

V. 10 "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." (NKJV) When David wrote that his God would not abandon him to the Sheol – the realm of the dead – he was referring to his soul. **V.10b "... nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."** Who is the Holy One referred to in this verse? We might want to say Jesus,



because in the NIV translation of the Bible, the Holy One refers to Jesus. It's true that this line is a prophecy regarding the Lord Jesus and that He is the Holy One. It's true that Jesus cannot remain in the realm of the dead because He will rise from the dead. But in Psalm 16, the phrase 'holy one' actually refers to David. Here, the phrase "your holy one" refers to David's soul. There are other versions which translate the 'holy one' as 'your faithful one'.

We do not know what difficulty David faced then, but we do know it was a matter of life and death. So today's message is entitled, "**Choosing between Life and Death.**" Today, we too are faced with life and death choices. Why can't we go out? Why can't we meet and assemble together? It is because we are afraid of getting infected. Why are we afraid of getting infected? Are we afraid of death?

In life, we will always encounter dangerous situations. How should we face them? Psalm 16 gives us a good answer in verse 1. "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge." The Psalm starts with this declaration and the verses that follow explain this declaration. This psalm is a declaration and an explanation.

I. A Declaration v.1

V. 1 "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge."

David declares to the Lord candidly, "Keep me safe, my God." Why? "Because I take refuge in you." I trust in you, I take refuge in you. In the original text, the phrase 'take refuge' meant that I entrust all that is precious to me, all that I have, to you. That is what David was saying: "I entrust everything to you so you have to keep me safe."

The phrase 'keep me safe' is also very meaningful. It refers to God's all-around protection, a 360° protection – in front, from behind, on the left, on the right, above, below. Just like a 360° CCTV monitor. David declared to the Lord, "O Lord, please watch over me all around, because I take refuge in you. I am not relying on myself; I entrust to you all that is precious and important to me because You are the only one I can trust."

Church, where is your trust as we face this pandemic? In what are you taking refuge? Is God your refuge? When you do not take refuge in him, neither does He have the responsibility to protect you. Now, if you say, "I trust Him," do you really trust Him?

Let us see how David explained what it truly means to trust in God, to take refuge in Him.



II. An Explanation V2-11

Verses 2-11 can be divided into sections: Vv.2-8 tell us how David took refuge in God. Vv.9-11 tell us how God kept David safe. That is why I say V.2-11 is an explanation of the first verse.

1. *How did David take refuge in God?* v.2-8

² I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." ³ I say of the holy people who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.⁵ Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷ I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

In these seven verses, there are three "Nos". The first "no" is in verse 2: "apart from you, I have no good thing." The second "no" is in verse 4: "I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips." The third "no" is in verse 8: "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken." These 3 "Nos" tell us that a man who truly takes refuge in the Lord will manifest three characteristics:

A. He puts God first

V.2 "I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."" A man who truly takes refuge in the Lord knows that without God, all good things mean nothing. Is it good to have health and a long life? Yes, these are good things, but without God, health and longevity may not necessarily be good. Moses said, "The days of man are but trouble and sorrow, they quickly pass."

Is having money and wealth good? It is certainly good. However, if God is not the Lord of our wealth, then without God we can all just become slaves of money. The Lord Jesus asked, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his own soul?

What about marriage - having a wife, a husband, children, is that good? Yes, these are all good, but without God, family and marriage can be a dreadful place. If everyone looks after his own



interest, if everyone is in the relationship for convenience, what happens? We will see no end to fighting, divorces, and litigations.

Psalm 73:25 says, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.” Such is a man who truly takes refuge in God. In the original text, the statement “from you I have no good thing” was “above you I have no good thing” – not apart, but above. Meaning, all that I have is not above you. My money is not above you. My wife, my children, my achievements are not above you. Church, is God first in your life?

B. He esteemed God as his object of love

V.3-4: I say of the holy people who are in the land, “They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight. Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.” Verses 3-4 are a comparison. There are two kinds of people here. First, there are the holy ones – the people of God. The second kind of men are those who worship other gods. They do not honor God as God.

David said that he delights in the holy people who are in the land. Why? Because he **loves** the Lord. Those who love the Lord are men who will love His children. He who loves the Lord will love those who love the Lord, who serve the Lord. We are even glad to just hear their names.

The apostle John said in **1 John 4:20 “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”** God is Spirit, we cannot see Him with our eyes and so we express our love for Him by loving His children. David loved the Lord. David loved the holy ones who are in the land. But David also said, “Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.”

In the original text, the word ‘gods’ was not in this verse. Therefore, what does the word ‘others’ mean? For those who do not yet know the True God, ‘others’ may refer to other gods. But for those who belong to the Lord, what does the word ‘others’ mean? It can be money, education, love, marriage, or family. Do not let these things take the place of God. The English translation means to ‘run after.’ In the original text it was ‘a betrothal price.’ When you fall in love with a woman and you ask for her hand in marriage, you would have to give her parents a betrothal price. David loved the Lord, he didn’t love any other gods. David gave the Lord his betrothal price because he loved the Lord. So he says, “I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.” A person who takes refuge in the Lord is a man who loves the Lord.



C. He valued God as his portion

⁵ “Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” David said the Lord is my portion and my cup. What does this mean? There is a book in the Old Testament called the book of Ecclesiastes. This book encourages us to be content to enjoy the things God has given us. Church, all of us have received graces from the Lord. Your gender; your height; your looks – whether you are beautiful, handsome or ordinary; your talents; your race; your husband; your wife - everything we have is God-given.

These are our portion. We must learn to be content with them because these are the boundary lines God has given us and these fall on pleasant places. Yet many people are not satisfied with what they have. Why are they my parents? Why are we not as rich as others? Why am I so short? Why am I Chinese and not American? Why is she someone else’s wife? Why, why, why?! We are not satisfied with the portions God has given us and we do not value God as our portion. During the times of the judges, the Israelites asked Samuel for a king. Samuel was not happy, but the Lord told Samuel that it is not you they are rejecting; it is I that they are rejecting.

When we are dissatisfied with what we have, we are dissatisfied with God. A person who truly trusts God is a person who values God as his portion. A person who truly trusts God shows these three traits: 1. He puts God first. 2. He esteems God as his object of love and he seeks to know God. 3. He values God as his portion. He is satisfied with everything God has given him; he recognizes them as his lot in life.

David was such a person, he said: “Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.” Now, let's look at how God protects those who trust in Him.

2. *How Did God Protect David? v.9-11*

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,
¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

A. Protection for David’s Whole Being

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure. Man has a body, a soul, and spirit. When we trust in the Lord, He will give us joy in our spirit, rest in our



body, and our whole being rests secure in the Lord. The problem David faced was not just a physical problem, but also a problem with his mind and spirit. Saul intended to kill him. Who was Saul? Saul was his master and also his father-in-law. Absalom wanted to kill him. Absalom was David's son. How do you suppose David felt? My master, my father-in-law, and my own son want to kill me. Am I that bad a person? These situations caused much anguish in David's spirit and heart! But when he trusted in the Lord, he was able to say, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure."

The Lord not only protects us physically, he also protects our mind, our emotions, our spirit. This Coronavirus pandemic not only brings physical and health concerns, it also causes psychological, financial, and spiritual problems. These problems will come one by one. Church, we must trust in the Lord, we must take refuge in Him.

B. Guidance for David on the Path He should Take

V.11 "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." The Lord shows the path of life to those who trust in Him. When we walk the path we ought to be on, there will be joy and eternal pleasures before us. From verses 9 -11, the words used are 'glad,' 'rejoices,' 'rest secure,' 'joy,' and 'pleasures.' David experienced a total change of heart.

Church, when we walk in the Lord's way, our circumstances may be unchanged, but our hearts can change. The best illustration is that of Jacob's life. When he had to face Esau and his 400 men, Jacob was faced with a life and death situation. Would he trust in his own wisdom or would he trust the Lord?

When the man of God appeared and wrenched his hip socket, Jacob became lame, but his life was changed completely. He became Israel. He became a prince. In the morning, even though the situation was still the same, even though he still had to face Esau and his 400 men, Jacob was no longer afraid. Initially, he had arranged his men into four groups; he had planned it so that he would be the last one to face Esau. He wanted a way to flee if trouble were to come. But now, he was the first one to face Esau. Because he now trusted the Lord, the Lord led him to take that path. And the outcome? God moved and the 20-year issue between the two brothers simply dissolved. The two brothers embraced each other. They experienced joy, pleasure, and gladness.

***Church, do you really trust the Lord? Let us ask the Lord
to keep us safe that we may take the path we ought to tread.***