

Song of Refuge

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] You may like to have open the Bibles at Psalm 16, page 430. And as I said at the beginning, this is part of our sermon series looking at various Psalms in the next few weeks to the end of July.

And let's pray that God helps us as we study His Word. God, our Father, speak to us from Your Word that makes us wise for salvation in Christ. Help us not only to understand, but to follow and trust and obey Your Word for the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

A friend of mine thinks that they should just get on with it and stop singing. But in contrast, I actually quite like musicals. See, he thinks, let's have a plot and why do they all break out into song?

Let's just sort of have the storyline. But I quite like musicals. I guess ever since, at the age of nine, I was the artful dodger in a performance of Oliver, which still remains perhaps my favourite musical.

And after all, I reckon there are things worth singing about, like food, glorious food, for example. And I suppose if you were in Madrid and it was a severe drought, you'd probably want to sing about the rain in Spain as well, or even puppy dogs tied up in string and other ridiculous favourite things of other people.

[1 : 24] Now in the Psalms, not all the Psalms are by David. Some of those by David tell us the context that was there when the Psalm was written, but not all.

Psalm 16 is by David, but we're not told the specific context. But in some ways, the Psalms of David, in the whole of the Psalms, are a bit like the libretto, the musical part of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

1 and 2 Samuel earlier in the Old Testament is largely the story of David becoming king in the second half of 1 Samuel, and then David's reign as king in 2 Samuel.

And in some ways, if you like musicals like I do, then think of reading 1 and 2 Samuel, but breaking into song from time to time with the Psalms of David that are in the book of the Psalms.

That's a bit like this Psalm, although we're not told the specific context for this Psalm 16. It does indicate some danger. It begins, Lord protect me.

[2 : 28] We're not told specifically the situation, but we know in David's life, there were many situations when his life was in danger, many times when he was being opposed, either in the time before he was king, when Saul was king and out to try and kill David, or later on after he'd become king, either at the hands of other nations roundabout trying to kill him, or even his own children or others in his court trying to depose him or kill him as well.

But even though the context of this Psalm expresses danger, so begins, Lord protect me, there is no fear in this Psalm. There's no terror.

David is not terrified, nor is he afraid, despite the danger that confronts him. See, often danger provokes fear.

For example, if you're watching a film and it wants you to know there is danger, the music will become sharper or discordant or minor chord or whatever and gradually you realise that you're building intention because you know that there is some danger coming.

We're a bit afraid. But not in this Psalm. This is a major chord Psalm. This is a Psalm of praise and joy, even though the context is one of danger for David, the writer of the Psalm.

[3 : 51] Let me give a suggestion of one type of danger David faced. It's not that this may be where it comes from, although it could well be the situation, but just to try and give us a specific context so it's not too general.

David, when he was being chased by King Saul, was hiding out in the Judean wilderness and there was one night when he realised that Saul and his men were over the other side of the valley, probably a fairly steep valley.

And during the night, David and his men went and took Saul's sword. They didn't kill Saul, but they came back and then called out to him and said, do you see that we could have killed you, but we haven't in effect?

Now that's the sort of danger that David was facing at different times of his life. And despite the danger, in this Psalm there is no fear expressed. It's a Psalm actually where the dominant motif is trust.

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. That's not a statement of David saying, here am I at my wits end, I've got nothing else to do, so I turn to you for refuge.

[4 : 56] No, that's not the thrust of it. Rather, when David says, for in you I take refuge, the sense is, that's my habit. I constantly take refuge in you, God.

That's why I'm now asking you to protect me. It's not that David has suddenly realised, I should have been turning to God for help in all this time, now I will, but rather the basis of praying to God, protect me, is that David has constantly turned to God for refuge in his life.

So his constant turning to God is the basis of his plea. The rest of the Psalm, in a sense, explains or expounds the trust that David has in God.

It shows him as one who trusts God fully with his life. Notice too, that trusting God does not mean an end or absence of danger.

David is facing danger here, but in the midst of danger, he trusts God. Not that trusting God and facing danger are mutually exclusive, but actually in the middle of the problem, David trusts God.

[6 : 09] The danger is still there. It doesn't go when he trusts God. And indeed, trying to picture this as a musical, here is David who's praying to God to protect me, but he bursts into a joyful song of praise and trust.

For David, as in the Bible generally, trusting in God is meant to permeate all of his life. So that means that during this Psalm, David is singing and he's singing in effect that God is everything to him.

That's what trust is. David is singing here that in effect he's hopelessly devoted to God. David is singing that he'll do anything, he'll go anywhere for God.

David is singing that his heart is full of love for God. David is singing that he shall not be moved to use various lines from various musicals, but applied in a sense to this Psalm.

David's trust in God is expressed by way of a personal relationship. And that's the first aspect of trust that this Psalm shows us. Yes, David had friends with him.

[7 : 24] Yes, he turned to caves and hid in the wilderness and so on. But ultimately, he knows that his refuge is personally God. Protect me, O God, for in you I find refuge or I turn for refuge.

David's refuge is personally expressed in a relationship with God. Verse 2 goes on to say, I say to the Lord, the personal name for God, Yahweh, you are my Lord.

I have no good apart from you. David is expressing there a personal relationship. You are my God. I belong to you and you are my God.

That's why I'm turning to you. That's why I turn to you for refuge. And he goes on in verse 2 to say, I have no good apart from you. Good being in the sense of welfare or benefit. That is, only you, God, provide benefit or welfare or good for me.

There's nowhere else to turn. So David declares a personal relationship as part of his trust in God. That then has the corollary, I guess, of David aligning himself with others who trust God.

[8 : 41] That is, your personal trust of God, if you can imagine a vertical dimension of you and God, necessarily brings you into relationship with others who have the same vertical relationship with God.

So verse 3 says, as for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble in whom is all my delight. What David is saying there is that others like me who trust God, they are my delight.

I'm in a relationship with them too. I associate with them, the holy ones, they're called. And probably behind verse 3 is a contrast with those who are not holy, who don't worship God, who may follow other idols.

And David goes on to say in verse 4, I shun them, I don't have association with them. But the first point is that if you're trusting in God, then necessarily it brings you into relationship with others, likewise, who trust in God.

A horizontal dimension because of the vertical relationship between David and God. Now this trusting God is exclusive. It's not a trusting God as an each way bet.

[9 : 47] Well, I'll put a bit of trusting God, but just to hedge my bets I'll find some other gods or some other ways of trying to find refuge. None of that at all. It is quite exclusive, trusting God and God alone.

So verse 4 says, those who choose another God, they actually multiply their sorrows. That is, if somebody's in danger or with sorrow and they turn to another God for help, they actually multiply their sorrows.

It gets worse. It's not even neutral. Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. That is, I will have nothing to do with them.

My delight is in those like me who are the holy ones who trust in God. But turning to other gods is folly. It multiplies sorrows.

So trusting in God is an exclusive thing. It's not something to be shared, trusting in other gods, other goals, other people, other devices.

[10 : 51] So therefore, trusting in God influences the way we behave. It influences our practices. For David, trusting in God means that he will not associate with idol worship.

He'll not associate with idolaters either. You see, trusting in God is not something that's just internalised in our heart but actually something that flows out and permeates every part of our life.

Now sometimes, I think as Christians, we sometimes confuse or misplace the language of trusting God. For example, sometimes we might say, I am trusting God for this job that you're applying for or wanting or something like that.

Or I'm trusting God for good health or I'm trusting God for safety or recovery or children or marriage or whatever it is. Sometimes, there's nothing wrong necessarily with that language but sometimes what it is actually doing is cloaking wrong gods with religious language.

That is, what sometimes people who use that language are actually saying is, what matters most to me is that job or recovery or health or marriage or children or whatever it is.

[12 : 12] That's my God in effect. That's my goal. That's what I'm wanting above all things. But they use a sort of Christian veneer of language to say, I'm trusting God for that.

But actually, what's going on is, that is my heart's desire. For David, trusting God meant that God himself was his heart's desire.

And that's an important distinction to make. God and God alone is to be our heart's desire. See how he puts it in verse 5.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. What David is saying there is it's not being king, it's not the land that is given to me or to the people, it's nothing humanly speaking or wealth or health, it is the Lord himself who is my chosen portion, my cup.

That is, the Lord himself is my heart's desire. Yes, sometimes, legitimately, we might trust in the Lord for answering prayers.

[13 : 26] But let's not use the language of trusting God to shield the reality sometimes when we're actually pursuing other desires of our heart.

God himself is to be our heart's desire. The Lord himself is to be our chosen portion and our cup.

That is, God himself is to matter most in our life. Interestingly, the language of these verses does echo the situation in 1 Samuel 26 when, as I mentioned before as a hypothesis, David is encamped in the wilderness and at night his men take the sword of Saul but don't kill him and then call out to Saul and in that circumstance when they call out to Saul because Saul the king is chasing David to kill him David calls out to him and says Now therefore let my lord the king hear the word of his servant.

If it is the lord who stirred you up against me may he accept an offering but if it is mortals that is if you trying to kill me is the bad thing a sinful thing may they be cursed before the lord for they have driven me out today from my share in the heritage of the lord saying go serve other gods.

See in that verse is the language of serving other gods that is in the psalm verse 4 and it is also the language of the heritage and the portion which we have just seen in verse 5 so it may well be that that is the circumstance which has given rise to this psalm a psalm of praise and joy in God a psalm of trust in God The next point to notice about trust in God is that trusting God means accepting and heeding the guidance from God In verse 7 David says I bless the lord who gives me counsel in the night also my heart instructs me I keep the lord always before me because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved You see trusting God does not leave our lives unchanged trusting God means heeding God's guidance and following him So I bless the lord who gives me counsel not just that

[15 : 52] God gives me counsel but behind that implicit is that I heed it and it's a counsel that becomes internalised in verse 7 the second part says in the night also my heart instructs me the word for heart here is actually not the word for heart it's actually a word for kidneys I imagine if we read it and said in the night also my kidneys instruct me we might think does that mean he has to get up to the toilet very often or something like that so I guess that's why the translation is heart but in ancient Hebrew kidneys was what was referred to as the place of choice and decision the place of exercising your will the place of sort of determination or even conscience to some extent that's behind what's going on here that God's counsel is given to David and that even in the night presumably while he sleeps there's a sense in which God's counsel is actually being internalised within David so that he does obey God's counsel or God's will that's the thrust of verse 7 that's being said there now it's understandable that if you trust something or someone then you actually heed their advice for example if someone whom you trust says oh you should do A

B and C then you do A B and C I mean if you don't do it then you don't trust them so if you get instructions about how to do some piece of equipment if you trust the maker or the manufacturer or whoever's written or given you the instructions then you actually do it if you don't do it or you do it in a different way it means that you're not trusting that person well so it is with God if we trust God then necessarily that trust will be expressed by heeding his counsel and advice that is it's not trusting God is not just a sort of warm fuzzy in our heart it actually influences all the aspects of our life that's what David is expressing in verse 7 and that's why he goes on in verse 8 to say I keep the Lord always before me not as a sort of talisman or reminder but God is before me and I'm following him I'm heeding his counsel and this is an ongoing practice of David not just a pledge now that oh

David God I'm in danger so please help me and if you help me then I'll follow you there are many people over the years who prayed prayers like that no David's prayer is I do follow you I do heed your counsel I do trust you and that's why I'm praying with confidence protect me and keep me from the danger that I face we still use the language of somebody being your right hand man the person that you most rely upon whether it's in work or general life or whatever David sort of uses that language at the end of verse 8 when he says about the Lord that he is at my right hand I shall not be moved that is God is his helper the context is probably a military context when that language of being at my right hand is used in other places it's often got this sense of strength and power and often in military context like in the Exodus where Pharaoh and his army are overthrown by God's strong hand and mighty arm and so on for David God is the one who will protect him and fight for him and so on that's the sense of the end of verse 8 but notice that the

Lord being at his right hand is something David can be confident of because David is following God and trusting God that is it's not in a sense for anybody to think God's at my right hand David has been in and is in a relationship with God that he knows God and he trusts God and he knows God to be at his right hand God well finally the note of trust in this psalm issues out in the last verses with what's called fullness of joy it's not because the danger has gone the danger is still there and yet in its midst there is fullness of joy in verse nine therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices and my body also rests secure the idea is the whole of the person is joyful and secure not that we can be divided into body and soul and heart and mind or heart as though they're three distinct parts of us it's poetic language to say all of me is joyful and secure

I sleep well at night is what the end of verse nine is saying when my body rests secure that is I'm not tormented by worries and fears there is danger there but I trust in the Lord and as a result of that I'm sleeping well I'm glad and my soul rejoices that is there's not fear but joy great joy even in the midst of danger and the basis of this joy in verse 10 for that is because you do not give me up to she I'll let your faithful one see the pit saying the same thing in two different ways and she or the pit is an ancient Hebrew way of saying in effect the place of the dead but with the connotation of being cut off from God it's not necessarily saying that David's life will be kept alive in a sense forever not necessarily it's the separation from God that God will not let happen that's what David is praying and praising God for he will not give me up to she the place cut off from God it's sort of a bit like the idea of hell probably a little bit vaguer in

[21 : 39] Hebrew thought than perhaps we think of hell in the New Testament but along the same lines instead of the place of the dead cut off from God verse 11 goes on you show me the path of life not only the path that leads to life but even the path along which is life itself that is life is the journey and the goal of the path and then the psalm finishes in your presence there is fullness of joy in contrast to sheol cut off from God without joy here in God's presence there is fullness of joy in your right hand are pleasures forever more this psalm shows an expression of trusting God it shows us that trusting God permeates all of life internally and externally all the affections and concentration of David are centred on God himself that's what trust means and that's why even in danger he can praise God with confident joy as you hear this psalm remember who sings its song not somebody who has a cushy life somebody with ease and somebody who's never known pain or distress this is the song of somebody who knows strife pain suffering distress and danger somebody whose life was under threat many times somebody who lost a child in infancy somebody who lost other children somebody who was threatened by their own children somebody who suffered in all sorts of different ways

Christian joy is often found most keenly etched on the faces of those who suffer people think of those whose Christian joy is most evident to you and most likely under the surface have been experiences of real pain and suffering and yet Christian joy is most evident in them that's the case for David in this and other of his psalms where joy is the dominant motif though his life was full of pain and suffering we find it of course in the New Testament as well consider some of the followers of Jesus who knew great pain great suffering even whose lives were under threat and some of whom lost their lives for their Christian faith James for example in the beginning of his letter says my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of any kind consider it nothing but joy that comes from one who knew suffering as well

Paul whose sufferings we know great detail about beatings imprisonments ultimately death wrote in Romans 8 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us and we could have picked any number of verses from Paul as well that say similar things about the place and overflowing joy in his life and in the Christian life despite the suffering and pain he'd experienced the same for Peter in one Peter Peter writes in this you rejoice even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials James Paul Peter all of them suffered a plenty for being Christians and yet all of them are marked in their writings and their sermons and their lives by great joy just like

David so it's no coincidence then that when Paul for example begins his first missionary journey at Antioch in Pisidia in what is modern day Turkey as he preaches to people in order to bring them to faith in God and faith in Christ preaches these words as to God raising Jesus from the dead no more to return to corruption he has spoken in this way I will give you the holy promises made to David therefore he has also said in another psalm you will not let your holy one experience corruption for David after he'd served the purpose of God in his own generation died and was laid beside his ancestors and experienced corruption but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption Paul is quoting Psalm 16 but he's just doing what actually

Peter had done earlier in the Acts of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost when he also was preaching with a view to the hearers becoming followers of Jesus Christ and so when Peter preached in Acts 2 the first reading that we heard today he said but God raised Jesus up having freed him from death because it was impossible for him to be held in its power for David says concerning Jesus I saw the Lord always before me for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced moreover my flesh will live in hope for you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your holy one experience corruption fellow Israelites I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day since he was a prophet he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne for seeing this

[27 : 50] David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah saying he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh experience corruption this Jesus God raised up and of that all of us are witnesses David when he finishes this psalm with statements of trust and praise is perhaps even beyond his own knowledge anticipating the resurrection of Jesus so that the place of the dead is actually conquered by Jesus being kept perfectly from corruption maybe for David he's expecting that God will spare him his life for a while but ultimately these words become prophetic and are fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead what that means for us is that we have even more basis for trusting in God and for joy even in the face of suffering for we know now that death is conquered by the resurrection of

Jesus its sting has been removed and that even though each one of us faces death like David did and even though we may yet die we can still rejoice to trust to trust to trust with confidence and protection to us we have even more reason than David for breaking out into songs of praise last Tuesday one of our church members died his name was

Siuan Wu one of the members of our Mandarin congregation he was 74 and he's been in Australia for a bit over two years had only just become a permanent resident he was killed on Tuesday afternoon when standing on a footpath he was hit by the side mirror of a truck Siuan was been a Christian for over 50 years I think he was converted through the influence of Western missionaries in China before they were kicked out in about 1950 for many years during the cultural revolution of Chairman Mao Siuan was in prison was in labour camps was sent to other parts of China he was told to look after sheep and sleep in the open air looking after them exiled in effect from his family from his wife and his sons you would never know that background as I didn't by knowing him as

I did for each Sunday he was a person with a smile and joy on his face etched in his face as he was amongst the first to come each Sunday to serve and set up and last to leave packing up chairs and things for the Mandarin service there there was a man who had suffered greatly for his Christian faith over many many years unfairly and unjustly but it hadn't left him embittered or angry but rather had indeed increased his joy you see if God himself is our chosen portion then whatever suffering and pain we face in life cannot deprive us of God but if in reality our heart's desire our chosen portion is health or wealth or job or family or children or marriage or security or fame then in the end when those things are challenged or lost then suffering doesn't bring joy but rather sorrow and bitterness

David knew as the Bible teaches us as Yiyuan knew that God himself is to be our chosen portion our joy our heart's desire and whatever this world may fling at us whatever pain and suffering we may face whatever danger is around us as David well knew in this psalm as Paul Peter James and others knew there's still every reason for joy indeed there's all the more reason for joy Christian joy derives from wholehearted trust in almighty God a trust that is heightened by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead dead and it issues forth into a joy that is honed and deepened by suffering not lost from it you see there are some things worth singing about as David has shown us today amen to good you be offended