

Chapter 13

THE GARDEN PRAYER AND THE EMPTY TOMB

Psalm 16

The greatest event in history since the very creation of the world itself, as well as the crowning proof of the truth of Christianity, is the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 16 contains a thrilling prophecy of this resurrection, written by David a thousand years before its fulfillment. As the apostles went forth to preach after Christ's ascension, in accordance with His Great Commission, the record tells that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Furthermore, they referred to the Scriptures (Acts 13:35–37), and used this psalm as the keystone of their preaching that the Scriptures foretold Christ's resurrection. We are, therefore, well justified in applying the psalm to Christ. Indeed, it is one of the greatest of all the Messianic psalms.

One of the first things to note is that, although Psalm 16 is written by David in the first person, no doubt against a background of his own experiences, it goes far beyond anything that could be applied merely to him. It clearly is a prayer from the

very heart of Christ, and we should read it as though Christ Himself is speaking the words.

The Garden of Gethsemane

Verses 1-4

Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my LORD: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

Although He speaks of the resurrection (verse 10), it is evident that the resurrection is placed in the future tense. Thus, the prayer predates the resurrection, and, for that matter, evidently predates the cross as well. Yet both the cross and the empty tomb are clearly in the very immediate future. All things considered, the context fits perfectly the conclusion that this psalm can be nothing less than the prayer uttered by Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before His crucifixion. The exposition below will proceed on that assumption.

He had just prayed: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Having accepted the bitter cup, He then turned Himself over to the care of His loving Father:

"Preserve me, God: for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee" (verses 1,2). That is, though He was holy and sinless, He was not offering His goodness to God as justification for escaping the wrath of God deserved by sinners. For He, Himself, was about to be "made sin for us, who knew no sin,

that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Instead of offering His righteousness to God, it was to be offered "*to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight*" (verse 3). It was His delight to offer the free gift of His own righteousness to those whose hearts desired forgiveness, the "saints" (that is, the "ones set apart") and the "excellent" (those who would gladly respond to His grace and love, and to whom thus could be imputed His own excellence).

On the other hand, there would be many others who would not have Him. They would, instead, "*hasten after another god*" (literally, "exchange for others"). There would be many excuses offered, and many other ways tried, to avoid responding to Him. But, since His righteousness is the only righteousness acceptable before a holy God, the end of all such dissimulating can only be that "*their sorrows will be multiplied.*" Ever since the great Curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17), the lot of fallen man has been one of sorrow. Christ has offered deliverance from sorrow and death, but for those who reject Him there can only be left an endless multiplication of sorrows.

Not that such people were irreligious. Sacrifices and offerings without end have always been found among those who reject Christ—even "*drink offerings of blood,*" as though the gods were thirsty for the blood of men and beasts! These were utterly repugnant, however, to the Savior.

Yet He, Himself, was about to drink the bitterest cup of all, and to offer up His own precious blood, in order that God's holiness might be vindicated, and yet sinners be saved. There were, indeed, drink offerings prescribed in the Mosaic Laws (Numbers 15:7), and even before the time of Moses (Genesis 35:14), but these were of wine, not blood, the wine symbolizing the blood which He would one day shed on the cross. Furthermore, these drink offerings were to be "poured out" at the altar, not

drunk, as the heathen did them. The people of Israel were specifically forbidden to eat or drink blood—the blood was given on the altar as an atonement for their souls (Leviticus 17:11–14), not as some mystical source of life and power, as the heathen believed.

For such as these, He could not “*take up their names into my lips.*” For each one who would truly confess His name, however, He would turn gladly to “confess his name before my Father” (Revelation 3:5).

The Cup and the Heritage

Verses 5–7

The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

The next three verses (5–7) seem particularly appropriate in the context of Christ’s prayer to His Father concerning the “cup” which He was to drink, and the comfort and assurance granted to Him even in light of that dread prospect. Verse 5 even mentions the cup: “*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.*”

When the tribes of Israel entered the promised land, each family received a certain “lot,” determined by the “casting of lots,” to serve as its inheritance. Jesus Christ, however, in His humanity never had a home, or even any place to “lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). The Lord was *His* inheritance, and that was sufficient. Furthermore, that lot was kept up and assured also by the Lord. “The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always these things that please Him” (John 8:29).

But that inheritance involved a “cup” as well—a word which comprehended one’s entire life experience, especially that portion of his experience which might involve testing or suffering. The specific cup which was to be taken by the Lord Jesus was the most bitter cup ever offered, that containing the wine of God’s wrath against the sin of the world (Revelation 14:19; Matthew 26:27,28).

And yet He, “for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). In spite of all the infinite suffering He must endure in order to redeem lost men, He could look forward to the great inheritance awaiting Him beyond the cross.

“*The lines [that is the surveying lines outlining the “lot” of His inheritance] are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage*” (verse 6).

His inheritance is nothing less than the entire world of the redeemed. “I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8). Indeed, He is to be “appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). And because He drank the cup on our behalf, we have the inestimable privilege of being “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

In the Gospel accounts, it is recorded that, after His ordeal of prayer and travail that night in the Garden of Gethsemane, when even “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44), “there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him” (Luke 22:43). It is apparently this event that is prophesied in verse 7 of the psalm. “*I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.*”

The Bodily Resurrection

Verses 8–11

I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

The last four verses of the psalm (all restated in Acts 2:25–28) do contain a remarkable summary of the events following the prayer in the Garden, especially His death and resurrection. Immediately after the prayer, Judas came, and He was arrested and taken to prison and judgment. The several pseudo-trials that followed, accompanied by insults and mockery, and, finally, beatings and condemnation to death, were unjust in the extreme, yet He bore it patiently and without resistance. This is all implied in verse 8 *“I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”* He had no public defender or counsel—only accusers and judges. Nevertheless, the Lord was both before Him for protection and at His right hand for guidance, so that He was not alone.

As a result of His Father’s assurance and presence, He could look forward with joy even to the experience of death itself. *“Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth.”* The word “glory,” following the Septuagint, is rendered by the word “tongue” in Peter’s quotation of this verse in Acts 2:26—“my tongue is glad.”

This might seem like an unusual interchange of meanings, especially if ordinary men were in view. For such men, their tongues are hardly instruments of glory! In fact, James says: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). Of the Lord Jesus, however, even His enemies testified: “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). Another psalmist, speaking prophetically of this same man, said: “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips” (Psalm 45:2). Of the one who was the very Word of God incarnate, speaking words which would last forever (Matthew 24:35), it is beautifully fitting to equate His tongue with His glory!

“My flesh also shall rest in hope.” After His trial and His death would come His burial, with the battered flesh of His body resting in Joseph’s tomb. However, that body would not return to dust, even though every other dead body since the beginning of time had so disintegrated. *His* body would merely rest until His spirit returned to it after accomplishing a vital mission in the heart of the earth. His ministry of substitution and propitiation would have already been fully accomplished on the cross, as testified by the victory cry, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) immediately before He withdrew His spirit from its body. His body could be committed to the sepulchre in full confidence of resurrection. And because of Him, all who believe in Him likewise “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (I Thessalonians 4:13,14).

“Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Not only would His body not return to the dust; it would not even begin the normal process of post-mortem decay. It would simply “rest” in death until He returned. In the meantime, for the three days His body was in the grave, Christ was still alive in His spirit, “By which he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (I Peter 3:19,20). This was not a preaching

of the Gospel, but a proclaiming of victory and judgment to those evil spiritual powers (the same ones of whom Peter also spoke in his second epistle) the “angels that sinned” and who were “cast down to hell” and were “to be reserved unto judgment” (II Peter 2:4), who had tried to thwart God’s plan of redemption through corrupting all flesh in the original world before the Flood. Following this visit to their great prison in the depths of the earth, He would return to His body waiting in the tomb, fashion it into an eternal body of glory, rise from the dead and ascend to heaven. “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God: angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (I Peter 3:22).

Furthermore, He would return with “the keys of Hades and of death” (Revelation 1:18), together with the spirits of all who had previously died in faith. “When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive” after He had “also descended first into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:8,9).

If anyone should be inclined to reject the idea of a prison (or “hell” or “pit”—various terms are used in Scripture with essentially the same place under consideration) in the deep interior of the earth on the ground that geologists reject such a notion, he should remember that no geological instruments are capable of determining whether or not such a region exists, and thus no geologist or other scientist is capable of refuting the clear testimony of the Bible that it does exist.

Furthermore, if anyone is disposed to reject the bodily resurrection predicted there on the basis that this is scientifically impossible, let him realize that this is the very point. God, not the scientists, ordained those principles in nature which we now call laws of science. Miracles, therefore, are possible—in fact, a miracle could well be defined as an event that is impossible by the laws of science, but which happens nonetheless. The historic *fact* of the bodily resurrection of Christ meets all the objective criteria of historicity as well as, or better than, any other fact of history.

The final verse of Psalm 16 looks forward to His resurrection, ascension, and “session” at the right hand of His Father in heaven. “*Thou wilt show me the path of life.*” Actually, the word “life” is in the plural, perhaps referring to the multitudes who have also received endless life through His mighty act. “*In thy presence is fullness of joy.*” Back in the presence of His Father, He would enter forever into the “joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2) as He prepared to drink the “cup” and “endure the cross.” This was the joy of seeing God’s purpose in creation finally accomplished, with multitudes of redeemed souls brought into God’s presence and fellowship forever.

The psalm concludes with the magnificent testimony, “*At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*” This is the very first reference in the Bible to Christ’s presence in heaven at the right hand of God, but far from the last. In all, there are 21 such references, and they can be arranged nicely into three groups of seven each.

The first such group consists of two references in the book of Psalms (the other being Psalm 110:1), and the five places in the New Testament that quote Psalm 110:1 (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13). Psalm 16:11 emphasizes the right hand of God as a place of fellowship, Psalm 110:1 as a source of power!

The second group consists of seven general references to Christ at God’s right hand in Paul’s epistles (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The third group consists of seven references in other books of the New Testament (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55; 7:56; I Peter 3:22).

At the right hand of the Father there is, therefore, both full joy and eternal joy. No more sorrow, no more pain, no more tears, no more death! (Revelation 21:4). “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).