

Psalm 16

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[0 : 00] As you look back on 2017, are you pleased with what it held?

Are you relieved it's almost all over? Are you fearful as to what 2018 might hold?

Entering a new year is like embarking on a long and uncertain journey. And one question that you might well have is, will I be kept safe during this year, this year as to come?

David, the author of the psalm, had a life full of danger. He lived in dangerous times, often surrounded by enemies, powerful enemies.

And for a long time before he became king, he was hunted by jealous King Saul, who demonstrated time and time again that he wished to kill David.

[1 : 21] It was quite possibly during this hazardous period of his life that he penned Psalm 16. Look at the opening words. Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.

His life was precious, just as your life is precious to you. And he committed himself to his God. Now, your teeth are precious, aren't they?

And you look after them very well. And you're very careful about what dentist you go to. If you go to a dentist at all, and you choose that dentist very carefully to look after your precious teeth.

But your soul is infinitely more precious than your teeth. And so David prayed to the Lord, keep me safe, my God, my God.

Now, a nervous child in a bustling city might well ask his father to hold his hand. You can ask a stranger. Notice the words there.

[2 : 31] Keep me safe, my God. There's a deep personal relationship between David and his God. And so he prayed, keep me safe, my God.

So, is the Lord your God? Would you describe the Lord as being your God? Do you look to him to keep you safe in 2018 and in future years that you might be given?

Does David's prayer resonate with you? If your prayer is that your God would keep you safe, what do you mean by that prayer?

Keep me safe. Do you mean that he would keep you safe so that you can continue to live your life the way that you want it?

To live your life your way. Is that what you have in mind when you pray, keep me safe? Or that he might keep you safe in the Lord's way?

[3 : 42] Are you concerned that the Lord keeps you from the power of temptation as you journey to heaven? What have you got in mind when you pray, keep me, Lord?

Lord, I'm concerned. Charles Wesley, he might not be safe in the world. Charles Wesley recognised that this tempestuous world is a very dangerous world for the Christian. And he wrote, While the narrower waters roll, remember the hymn?

while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high. Hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life is past.

The Apostle Peter, writing to suffering Christians of the eternal inheritance that was kept safe for them, said that they, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that's ready to be revealed at the last time.

So, what do you have in mind when you pray, keep me safe, my God? Do you need to adjust your concept of safety?

[4 : 58] The psalmist made a very instructive statement of who he relied upon in verse 2. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, apart from you I've got no good thing.

But do notice, the text, that the first Lord is written in a different way from the second Lord. And we don't get the full sense of this simply by listening to the word in English.

The first Lord, capital L, followed by small capitals, O-R-D, means Yahweh. That's the name of the unchanging, gracious, faithful, covenant-keeping God that made his way clear to Moses, that made his name clear to Moses.

He's the one who guided Israel, his particular people, through the desert to the promised land. So, David spoke to Yahweh, the one who is the everlasting I Am, and said, you are my Lord.

Now, that second Lord, with small letters, means Master, it's translated. So, is the Lord, the Lord that Moses worshipped, the Lord that revealed himself to Moses, the Lord that led the people of Israel through the desert, is he your Master?

[6 : 28] I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. Apart from you, I've got no good thing.

Is he the one who's going to keep you safe, to keep you in the way? The one who says to you, this is the way, walk in it. Now, David didn't stop calling the Lord his Master.

He didn't just delight in the Lord, the fountain of all good, but then went on to state his delight in others who knew and reflected the glory of this same Lord.

In verse 3, he said this, I say of the holy people who are in the land, they are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.

There's a very instructive incident in the life of Ruth, the Moabite woman in the Old Testament. She was the widowed daughter-in-law of an Israelite woman called Naomi, who had gone to live in Moab at a time of famine in Israel.

[7 : 43] After a very sad time in Moab, Naomi heard that the famine was over in Israel, and she set off to return to her home country. And the Moabite, Ruth, went with her.

And despite Naomi urging her to stay with her own people in Moab, Ruth was determined to accompany Naomi. She replied to Naomi, Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.

Where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. And then we've got a really important phrase. Your people will be my people.

And your God will be my God. She had not only heard of Yahweh, but of his people too. She expressed her longing for their company in the same breath that she confessed her commitments to Israel's God.

They were the holy people in whom was all her delight. She'd heard about them. What a delightful people. Yeah, what a great God. What a privileged people.

[8 : 55] And that people was her delight. But who was she? Who was Ruth the Moabite? She was David's grandmother.

What influence had she on David, who confessed exactly the same thing, the holy people are the noble ones in whom he delighted. David had an excellent example in the family.

So if your parents or grandparents are you a good example, how do you speak of your fellow believers?

Do you love being in their presence, especially as they worship and serve and learn from the Lord, their master, their saviour? See, you can't divorce the Lord from the Lord's people.

They're closely united. There's also a link between spiritual safety. We've been talking about keep me safe.

[10 : 04] There's a link between spiritual safety and our relationship with other Christians. We're very vulnerable if we choose to follow a lonely Christian life.

In the world of wild animals, the hunted animals keep together for mutual safety. The most vulnerable to predators are those on the edge of the herd or simply living by themselves.

Remember, the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The writer to the Hebrews addressed believers in danger of giving up in the midst of difficulties and dangers.

They were showing signs of drifting away from the faith. And so he urged them, chapter 10, verse 22, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another.

Returning to David, he had a close relationship with Jonathan, the godly son of King Saul. They faced a common threat by King Saul. In 1 Samuel, chapter 20, verse 16, we read this, Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David saying, May the Lord call David's enemies to account and Jonathan made David reaffirm his oath out of love to him because he loved him as he loved himself.

[11 : 53] And that close relationship between Jonathan and David was so helpful in terms of David being secure.

David's commitment to the Lord led him to rejoice in the companionship of Jonathan and vice versa. The two of them encouraged one another in stressful, dangerous times.

David did not choose to live the life, he didn't choose to live the life of a spiritual lone ranger. He sought out the mutual companionship and support of the godly Jonathan.

So in danger and hardship, do you run to the Lord for refuge? Are you particularly careful and delighted to meet with believers for spiritual mutual encouragement and prayer?

Do you see this as a way in which the Lord keeps you safe? The Lord uses means. Do you use the means yourself or do you despise them?

[13 : 01] Not every Israelite in David's time ran to the Lord for security and meaning in life. Some didn't run to worship the Lord alone.

They hedged their bets by trying out other gods, false gods that couldn't save or satisfy. Look at verse 4.

got so much to say to us at the end of 2017 in our multi-faith society. Verse 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. A few years ago we went to the British Museum and it was staggering to see shelf after shelf of little gods made out of stone, clay or wood from the Middle East.

Originally they'd be painted brightly, perhaps covered with gold leaf to make them attractive. And you can picture such a god given pride of place in a household and the owner transfixed as he viewed the idol set up in a place of honour.

[14 : 19] These idols couldn't speak or hear but they could be seen and admired and sometimes neighbours would be jealous of the god they had next door.

Sometimes sadly sacrifices, even human sacrifices would be made to such gods. For some strange reason even Israelites who should know better look to these gods in addition to the Lord or perhaps even instead of the Lord for prosperity and security.

Does that sort of thing go on today? Yes, I once knew a man here in this country who used to make gods like this out of wood and then he sold them until he became a Christian and chose better ways and he burnt his gods and the chard remains were thrown into a dustbin.

Now I don't think for one moment that any one of you would set up a god of wood or brass in your kitchen. You simply wouldn't expect such a god to keep you from danger.

And then do you gaze and gaze at your bank statement? Do you have an inordinate love and delight in money?

[15 : 42] Do you love to make money? Is that what your life is all about? What effect does it have on your family? The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy 1 Timothy chapter 6 Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. Many orientated parents may not give attention, affection or time to their children.

What happens to children starved of love? Now you might not gaze at a small wooden god, but do you admire your muscles or your looks in the bathroom mirror and suppose that your physical appearance gives you security?

beauty. We had a strong, fantastic, attractive plant in our back garden until quite recently.

[17 : 07] It looked absolutely fantastic. It was a delight. It looked as it would bloom forever, but then the frosts came. Wealth, strength, beauty, success are all like this.

You probably wouldn't look to a fortune teller to give you the sort of news that would give you the courage to face the future, but do you trust in the wisdom of the politicians and the things that they say and they promise?

the world has its gods and its idols to give courage and a sense of security in the face of danger, but drowning sorrows in drink and drugs and ungodly relationships does what David says.

Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. David shunned the things that the ungodly advise and live for.

He was consistent to his words in Psalm 1. You're probably very familiar with them. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

[18 : 42] What do you think about when you lie on your bed? Perhaps you're woken up in the middle of the night and cannot get to sleep. Look at verse 7.

I will praise the Lord who counsels me even at night my heart instructs me. Perhaps nothing comes to you from the Lord when you toss and turn.

Is that because you've not given time to read the word of God or to meditate upon it? It might be that there's nothing in your mind to meditate upon.

No sermon, no Bible study, no recent Bible reading, no godly conversation. Let's move on to verse 8. David said, I keep my eyes always on the Lord.

With him at my right hand I shall not be shaken. The safety there. The ESV translates those words and the authorised version too, I've set the Lord always before me because he's at my right hand I shall not be shaken.

- [20 : 02] The psalmist didn't say he set an idol before him and gaze at that idol and trust in that idol. His confidence wasn't in the gods of the world. Look at Psalm 27 verse 4 and I would like you to look at it, it's such a helpful verse, Psalm 27 verse 4 because it shows the heart of David, it shows the way he ticks.

Psalm 27 verse 4, one thing I ask for the Lord, this only do I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple, for in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling, he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.

Now if you want to be kept safe in 2018, want to be kept in safety, notice the passion there of David, one thing I seek, I dwell in the house of the Lord, he will keep me safe inside his shelter.

Can you see the one thing above everything else? that you should seek. It's important for you to gaze on the beauty of the Lord.

But how do you do it? Other practical steps that you can take to gaze on the beauty of the Lord? It's quite simple in one sense.

- [21 : 47] Read the Bible, read it daily. Do you? Do you gaze upon the Lord as you read his word daily? Or is it something rather trivial, a bit boring, we've got far better things to do?

Two, use opportunities to listen to preachers who are faithful to the apostles preaching. That's simple in one sense.

Listen to God's word being preached. being preached by those who are faithful to the apostles preaching. Not those who deny or never mention the great doctrines of the Christian faith summed up in the ancient creeds and confessions.

Why? Because such people are taken up with the religious ideas of this world, quite separate from God and his revelation. You won't get anything from them.

Listening to them is like sunbathing at midnight or trying to grow fruit in a desert. Listen to those who bring God's word to you faithfully, truthfully, clearly.

- [22 : 59] Three, take the Lord's supper seriously and use it to meditate upon the gracious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ for us.

Don't despise the provisions in the church to make you grow in knowledge of him. Spiritual growth is not automatic. Set the Lord before you at your right hand.

You have to do it. You have to make those things your priorities. David saturated himself with God.

He kept his eyes always on the Lord. Verse saying, he rejoiced in the Lord. He was content in the Lord. Look at verse 5. Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup.

Verse 6, the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely I have a delightful inheritance. Was 2017 a good year for you?

- [24 : 11] Was it a year which was memorable for all sorts of good, pleasant reasons? Just go back to verse 2. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, apart from you I've got no good thing.

Joseph Addington, the hymn writer, understood these things as he looked back on his life. Listen to the hymn writer. When all thy mercies, oh my God, my rising soul surveys, transported with the view I'm lost in wonder, love and praise.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts my daily thanks employ, nor is least a cheerful heart that tastes these gifts with joy.

So are you content in the Lord? Or do you look for contentment elsewhere? Is there a restlessness within you that makes you constantly complain or long for other things?

David had learned the secret of contentment. There's a Puritan writer, Jeremiah Burroughs, and he wrote a book in the 17th century.

[25 : 29] That book is called The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. Contentment is something that we must all strive for.

The Apostle Paul seemed to find it. Listen how he wrote to the Christians at Philippi. I have learnt, said Paul, to be content whatever the circumstances.

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. What about David? Was David always in pleasant places?

Was he experiencing a delightful inheritance when he was on the run from Saul? Yet he was thankful in the circumstances that the Lord placed him.

[26 : 34] Even in trouble, he was able to say, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

Now was David content, rejoicing in the Lord, in the Lord alone? When we're given to complaining and anxiety, we need to remember David.

We need to remember Paul. We too can learn the rare jewel of Christian contentment. We can all do all things through Christ who strengthened us, but we've got to learn.

It's not an easy lesson for us, but it's there to be learned, it's there to be experienced. Notice that David was content with his past and present circumstances, but he also had a hope that reached beyond the grave.

most of us are familiar with his words, surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[27 : 46] In Psalm 16, we have a similar confidence in verse 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 Psalm encourages us to be filled with hope as we look forward to the future, but way beyond 2018. David was a very good model of true godliness, true faithfulness, but as you know, not a perfect model.

But people would sing this Psalm for centuries after David wrote it, and indeed people continue to sing about that Psalm in different settings, down through the centuries, down through the centuries in the Old Testament.

People would sing that Psalm, and thoughtful singers would have picked up something that they just didn't understand. They'd have noticed these words, verse 9, My body will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

decay. What was this mystery? David couldn't have been speaking of himself. He died, and was buried.

[29 : 27] His body did see decay. There's a mystery there. Life's a mystery. Tonight, vast crowds will assemble in London and elsewhere to celebrate the coming of 2018, longing for, but not expecting something better.

Perhaps most are best described by the words of the Apostle Paul, without hope, without God in this world, characterized by skepticism, a feeling of lostness, confusion about the meaning of life, and yet mocking of anyone who claims to have the truth.

Let me take you to another crowd, equally confused, and bewildered, and perplexed, by Christ's disciples singing the praises of God, described in Acts chapter 2 by Luke, the medical man and careful historian.

Luke described what happened, what happened when the crowd saw these people rejoicing, and praising God, witnessed by thousands of people.

He described how the Apostle Paul stood up courageously and explained the mystery of verse 9, verse 9 of Psalm 16, pointing out its relevance to everyone who had assembled.

[30 : 59] Most of the crowd were very religious people, and had probably sung that psalm many times, but thoughtlessly glossed over the words, my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

Let me quote Peter. Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day, but he was a prophet, and knew that God promised him on oath that he had placed one of his descendants on the throne.

Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it.

In a court of law, two or three witnesses would normally carry the day. If you read Luke's account of the event, you would realize that they all that Peter mentioned were about 120 men and women.

Far more than two or three witnesses, 120 of them. And then Paul mentioned on another occasion more than 500 people witnessed the resurrected Christ.

[32 : 25] Now, if you're not yet a believer, how many witnesses do you need for you to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ? Believe in him and make him not only your master but your only hope for eternity.

What more do you require? I mentioned hundreds of people who saw the resurrected Christ. Now, normally, you would respond to two or three witnesses, wouldn't you, if they were reliable?

But here we've got hundreds. hundreds. And so why don't you believe in the Savior? Isn't it the same sort of problem that Ezekiel had with the people in Israel who had hard, stubborn hearts?

There's something wrong with your heart. The evidence is before you and you don't believe. Now, isn't that a sign of great wickedness, great stubbornness, rebellion against God?

God who said everything to you has given you evidence to believe. And yet you say, I don't want to believe. I don't trust this God.

[33 : 34] So what is your attitude to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe in him? Do you trust in him? Is your only hope for eternity in him?

Why not turn to him? Why not turn to him today? Believe in him and have everlasting life. Now, throughout 2018, and way into the future, forever and forever, and to take part in that great joy that David had as he looked forward to dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

Why not turn to him now? Let's pray. Gracious God, we come to you confessing that we are very slow to learn, confessing that even now our hearts are very often stubborn, very often unbelieving, and we don't listen to those evidences that you give us, those encouragements to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We confess that very often we complain and we're not content, and we are very slow to learn the lesson of contentment. Do pray that you'll help us to respond to your word, help us to seek you diligently, to set you before our face.

We ask it in our Saviour's name for his sake and for his glory. Amen. Lord, you've been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

[35 : 14] Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Amen.