

A Solid Hope

Our second Scripture reading is the 16th Psalm. Both Peter, in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost and Paul, during his first missionary journey, quote from this psalm when preaching about Jesus' death and resurrection. Notice with me how David's poem speaks to us about the solid hope we have in Christ. Follow as I read **Psalm 16**.

- 1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.*
- 2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."*
- 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble ones
in whom is all my delight.*
- 4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.*
- 5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.*
- 6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.*
- 7 I bless the LORD, who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.*
- 8 I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*
- 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.*
- 10 For you do not give me up to Sheol
or let your faithful one see the Pit.*
- 11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

In his book, [*The Great Divorce*](#), C. S. Lewis pictures for us in his remarkable way, the contrast between people of hope for everlasting life with God and those who are destined for eternal separation in hell. Those who have rejected God are pictured as ghosts, incomplete people, who are given a bus tour of heaven and are offered the opportunity to become God's redeemed, "Solid People." These unredeemed ghostly people interact with the Solid People. As it turns out, the ghostly people, representing the unregenerate, are totally uncomfortable with and ill-suited for life with the Solid People in the new heaven and earth. Because of what they are, they cannot enjoy or even tolerate being in this solid redeemed new earth with God's people.

In the 16th Psalm, David gives us a portrait of this "great divorce." He shows us the difference that faith and hope make in our present life and our eternal destiny. He contrasts the life and hope of God's people, "the saints who are in

the land” (v.3a), with those who “run after other gods” (v. 4a). And he describes the solid hope we have in God, a hope that transforms us into God’s “solid people.” Unlike David, who only knew the message of Christ “from afar” (Heb. 11:13), we can read this psalm, and see the promises and the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

Our Christian hope is not a matter of wishful thinking, which is the way we frequently use the word “hope.” My daughter, who lives on Chicago’s North Side, gave me a Cubs baseball cap, which I wore during my time with Jan in Florida. I’ve discovered that even hopeful Cubs fans seem to be pessimistic because their team is habitually falls short of championships. So a frequent saying Chicagoans would say to me is, “Just wait till next year.” Biblical hope is not wishful thinking but is the faith that we have in Christ and God’s true promises.

Scripture says “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul” (Heb. 6:19). We have been born again “into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). And this solid hope we have, as a result of God’s grace at work through our faith, even during times of suffering and character building, does not disappoint us. This solid hope is guaranteed and enabled by the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5).

In a world of uncertainty and hopelessness, we need a solid hope. We need hope for ourselves and for those around us who have no hope or reasons to hope for a better life or for an eternal destiny. David learned early on to call upon the Lord for his rescue and to seek the Lord as his refuge, beginning with his facing Goliath (1 Sam.17) and when fleeing from the relentless pursuit of murderous King Saul (1 Sam.19ff). David understood that his only hope for rescue and deliverance was the Lord, upon whom he absolutely depended.

In Scripture, salvation can refer to God’s temporal rescue of an army from the enemy, or it can refer to God’s rescue work of delivering us from the power of sin and death into the realm of the kingdom. David’s calling upon the Lord to keep him safe was an expression of a heart that learned to seek the Lord, in whom he found refuge. Salvation in Scripture is a dynamic concept, referring to our having been saved, our being saved, and the fact that we will finally be saved for the everlasting kingdom (Rom. 8:24; Phil. 2:12; Rom. 5:9). We have assurance of our final salvation, not from a baptism certificate, or remembering a past decision, but by our lives giving evidence of “things that accompany salvation,” which is the way we make our hope sure (Heb. 6:9, 11). We have assurance of our final salvation by the present work of God’s grace in our lives, that is, salvation from the last enemy we will face—death.

David speaks of his relationship with God in personal terms: “I said to the Lord, ‘You are *my* Lord; apart from you I have no good thing” (v. 2). David’s hope for his deliverance is based upon a personal relationship with God, who is his highest good and the source of every other blessing in his life. In fact, for David,

life without God simply isn't worth living. He would agree with Paul that Christ is not just an addition to life to make it more tolerable. Christ *is* our life (Col. 3:4).

Our hope for the future is founded upon the reality of our personal relationship with the living God, whom we have come to know in and through Jesus, his Son. We know him to be the God who loved us so much that he gave us his Son (Jn. 3:16). After the cross, on which Jesus died for each one of us, we have no reason to doubt the Father's love for us.

We have hope because we are part of a community of hope, which shares our continuing relationship with God. David disassociates himself from idolaters who run after false gods and who perform their idolatrous rituals (v. 4). David learned the joy of fellowship with the saints, those who are made holy by God's saving, transforming grace. We must never forget that we are "in this together," that we are part of a community of hope, people who share the hope of the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:18). In times when we especially need to be encouraged with a solid hope, we need one another. Not that we need to hear "sermons" from one another, just words of loving affirmation and reassurance.

The "beloved pastor" of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, David HC Read, told his congregation: 'One of the reasons I believe in the Resurrection is that my mother told me. And to this day a strong element in my belief is the number and quality of the people who told me' (F Rutledge). My faith in Jesus was ignited and stirred by the many good and godly people in my life, "the holy ones in the land" (v. 3).

Paul says that the Holy Spirit is the first fruits and also the deposit, or down payment to assure us of our final redemption in the new heaven and earth (Rom.8:23; 2 Cor.5:5). Jesus spoke of the place he is preparing for us (Jn. 14:2), which refers to his plans for this renewed, finally redeemed creation (Rom. 8:19), where he will allow us to revel in his glory (Jn. 17:24). This is the hope of the "riches of his glorious inheritance" that Paul prays that the church might know (Eph. 1:18). Paul prays that our spiritual eyes might be opened to see, to comprehend our solid hope, our hope for an everlastingly solid existence in the fullness of God's presence and amidst the full glories of his redeemed creation.

The amazing truth is, God desires our fellowship and wills that it continue forever. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, dwells with us, abides in us, as we abide in him. And he wills that we remain in his love forever (Jn. 17:20ff). We enjoy his fellowship now and look forward to complete, unbroken fellowship for eternity. The Lord says that we are his portion and delight and he himself is our portion and our inheritance. We are prepared for eternity when we come to the place in our lives when we can say the Lord is our portion and that he is all that we need (Ps.19:57). I believe the Lord is leading me to that place in my long life.

The closing verses of our text, quoted in the preaching of Peter and Paul, speak of the resurrection of Christ and also apply to the hope we have in our bodily resurrection. As Paul said expressly, the full meaning of these verses could not have applied to David, whose body did indeed suffer decay. Obviously, they were prophetic of Jesus (Acts 13:36f) and they represent the solid hope that we have in Christ, and for us, our future bodily resurrection.

By God's grace, received through our faith in the resurrected Jesus, we have been born again into this living, solid hope of our bodily resurrection to everlasting life in the renewed heavens and earth (1 Pet.1:3f). It is Christ alone who continues his work in us. What we receive and experience now, in these sin-corrupted yet being-redeemed bodies is but a foretaste of what we will become and experience in our resurrection bodies upon the redeemed heavens and earth.

The more we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18), the more solid will appear our hope. Those who keep their eyes of faith on Jesus, seeking to grow in intimacy with him and fruitful service for him, will be people of unshakable hope (Heb. 12:2). The more we are filled with the Holy Spirit the more he will produce in us, *especially* during the times of struggle and suffering, the fruit of perseverance, character and hope (Romans 5:3ff). Those who are called to suffer the most for their faith become the strongest in a solid hope. And the joy of his presence and the pleasures that come to us from his right hand day by day are only a "foretaste of the glory divine" that awaits us.

My well-meaning neighbor gave me a copy of a newsweekly that features yet another scientific and historic examination of the Shroud of Turin, which seemingly is featured about every 4 or 5 years. This much-studied and debated relic is posited as a vital piece of evidence of the reality of Jesus' resurrection. This latest article results in a much- doctored photo of what Jesus must have looked like: a good-looking, very Caucasian young man, "camera ready" for a movie. But for good reason Scripture gives no hint about Jesus' appearance that would have been attractive (Is. 53:2). Besides all of this, Jesus' body was wrapped in strips of linen and his face with a napkin, which were left behind when he arose (an argument in the 16th Century John Calvin gave against the shroud).

Jesus' resurrection body, which was given to the eleven and then over 500 of his followers (Acts 1:3; i Cor. 15:6) was transphysical, recognizable yet no longer limited by time, space or corruption. He offered to "Doubting Thomas" the invitation to touch his hands and side to examine the scars left by his wounds, but Thomas was satisfied by the reality of being in his resurrected presence. I too have all the evidence I need, with the resurrection accounts, featuring an empty tomb, and especially the transformation of the first disciples from fearful, defeated followers into indomitable witnesses who set the world afire with a life-

changing gospel, men and women were willing and were often called-upon to give their lives because of their solid hope in their risen Lord.

Our solid hope tells us there is no separation from the love of Christ, not even by our final enemy, death (Rom. 8:37ff). Jesus promised the repentant thief on the cross, “I tell you the truth, *today* you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43). Until the resurrection of the body, believers who have experienced mortal death have gone into the presence of Jesus, which he calls paradise. Paul says that life with Jesus in paradise is “better by far” than this mortal life, with Jesus living within us through the Holy Spirit (Phil. 1:23). David seems to say there is great joy in paradise, where there are pleasures at the right hand of God (v. 11).

Our text contrasts God’s people of a solid hope with those who have no hope. Without hope and the transforming gift of eternal life our lives are ghostly, fragile and fleeting. Faith teaches, indeed shows us, that this present life is not all there is. These bodies of ours, this mortal, sin-infected flesh is wasting away and what we can now see is temporary, while what is unseen, that for which we hope, is eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

In CS Lewis’ allegorical story, the ghostly people, those who rejected the gift of eternal life that would make them Solid People, were given the opportunity to remain in heaven by becoming “solid,” yet they refused. Lewis notes, through “the Teacher,” that those who wished to change their destiny could do so:

“Everyone who wishes it does. Never fear. There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “*Thy* will be done.” All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened” (p. 72f, *The Great Divorce*).

By grace we come to Christ to be transformed into his Solid People, who have a solid hope of everlasting life in his glorious kingdom. This is the salvation for which David longed as he wrote this 16th Psalm. Those of us who are in Christ are redeemed and called to be people of hope—hope for ourselves and for others. As Paul reminded the Thessalonians, we grieve over the death of loved ones, but not like those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). We sorrow over the momentary separation, but can also celebrate the life that departed loved ones now enjoy with Jesus. And we also should rejoice in the solid hope that assures us we will be with them and with our Lord forever.