

The Father Protected Jesus from Decay

Psalm 16:10
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When Peter quoted this evening's text in his Pentecost sermon, he stressed the fact that David died, was buried and remained in his tomb. His body underwent the process of decay that everyone has been subject to since the fall.

Everyone in the Bible experienced the same decay, except the two men whom God miraculously took out of the world, viz., Enoch and Elijah. Job knew that he would experience it before being raised from the dead. He said, *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God* (Job 19:26). And we all know what Martha said about her brother Lazarus when Jesus told those who accompanied them to remove the stone from his grave. She said, *Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days* (John 11:39).

The most amazing thing about this evening's text is not that Jesus' body wouldn't remain in grave, though that's amazing in itself. No one's body will stay buried forever. Nor is it that Jesus occupied the tomb for only three days. Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son were dead less time than that before Jesus raised them up. In fact, they hadn't even been buried yet. Rather, the amazing thing in our text is that God the Father promised that Jesus' body wouldn't decay during the three days of his entombment.

David and the Messiah

Before we consider how Psalm 16 applies to Jesus, we have to see what it meant for David. David probably wrote it while he was fleeing from King Saul. It expresses his trust in God.

In the first two verses of this psalm, David described his relationship to the Lord. Verse 1 says he trust the Lord: he looked to God to preserve him as Saul pursued him. Note here that he addressed God as *El*, a Hebrew word that means that Strong One. He believed God had the power to protect him. But in verse 2, he confessed something else about God. Here he used God's covenant name *Jehovah*, which emphasizes his faithfulness to his people. The first occurrence of the word *LORD* appears in all capital letters, a practice most translations follow to identify this particular name of God. But with the second occurrence of the word *Lord*, the translators used regular type. Here it's *Adonai*, which means Master. David knew he was safe with the Strong One, his ever faithful covenant Master, protecting him.

God is the Strong One who saves his people. James Boice made a helpful observation about it. He wrote, “We have an equivalent of this in our common New Testament way of speaking when we say that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Savior corresponds to *el*, since it is as ‘the Strong One’ that Jesus saves us. Lord is the equivalent of *Adonai*. It means that Jesus is also Master of our lives.”¹ David never doubted his covenant-making and covenant-keeping Lord. We should not doubt it either. David’s confidence should be our confidence.

Verses 3 and 4 go on to identify the results of David’s confidence in God. Those who trust the Lord delight in fellowship with God’s saints on the earth. When David wrote this, he probably had Jonathan in mind, as well as others who had joined him from time to time. And just as importantly, David refused to make friendships with those who chased after other gods and participated in profane worship. He knew that God’s people would help him draw closer to God, while God’s enemies would lead him away. Paul repeated this principle in 1 Corinthians 15:33, where he reminded the church that evil associations corrupt good habits. As God’s people, we should be intentional about everything we did to serve him because all of it affects us one way or another.

The next few lines of this psalm — verses 5 through 8 — review the blessings David had experienced as a result of trusting the Lord. One is that God was his *portion* and *cup*, i.e., the one who satisfied all his needs. Another is that the Lord was his *lot*, which means that he could count on him to protect him from every danger. The third is that David’s *lines* or inheritance had fallen in pleasant places, i.e., the Lord increased his joy and contentment, even during his severest trials. And David’s last blessing was that God had given him *counsel* or wisdom to fulfill his service.

Now, David had already experienced these blessings and continued to experience them as he wrote about them. He knew that God would bless him because God was with him. Verse 8 says, *I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* But the last three verses of Psalm 66, the ones we want to highlight this evening, promise future blessings. David expected God’s blessings to go on and on forever.

Death seems to get in the way sometimes, but it’s really just a minor blip in our lives. It’s not even that bad because the Lord always uses it for our good. How do we know this? Three reasons. First, we have God’s promise of everlasting life. In fact, the Lord has already given us spiritual life because of what Jesus did for us. First John 5:13 says, *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life.* Therefore, like David, we die in the certainty of the gospel’s promises. Second, we also have a Savior who never experienced corruption. Yes, his Father forsook him on the cross so that he might experience the torment of hell in our place, but he never abandoned him in the grave. And third, the Lord promises life and joy and

¹ James Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), *in loc.*

pleasure that will never end as a result of Jesus' victory over the grave. David believed that God would bless him in the next life because he had blessed himself abundantly in this life through the promise of his Savior. We should believe this, too.

When David prophesied no decay, he knew he wasn't writing about himself. How could he not expect to see corruption when all his fathers had and Nathan told him explicitly that his days would expire and he would go to his fathers. No, the promise of no decay had to be for his seed, the promised Messiah, who would reign forever (1 Chron. 17:11–14) because the notion of decay is completely incompatible with the never-ending nature of the Messiah's reign over the kingdom of God. Peter said, *Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption* (Acts 2:30–31).

Now, if David understood this, so did Jesus. This is why the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews said that he endured the cross and despised its shame for the joy that had eternally been set before him (Heb. 12:2). We can only suppose that Jesus gave his life on the cross with the words of Psalm 16 strengthening his soul.

A Promise for Us

This evening's text arose from David's experiences. Even in his worst trials, he trust God to preserve him and bless him with everything he needed. And he also prophesied about the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins but rested in the hope that his body would not decay. This gave him boldness to say, *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

But this psalm is also a record of God's promises for you.

People handle death in different ways. Unbelievers, knowing they stand under the condemnation of God, fear it, though often pretending it's just a natural occurrence. Their philosophy is to grin and bear it. But it's not pleasant, even for believers. Jesus himself wept at Lazarus' grave. We know it's a result of sin, and the separation it brings hurts everyone it touches. We don't want to say goodbye to loved ones. We have to keep reminding ourselves that death is not the end. Scripture says that we *walk through the valley of the shadow of death*; we don't live there. And our Savior accompanies us every step of the way. His rod and staff protect and comfort us.

We rest in the confidence of Jesus' presence because we know he lives. In a sense, he began conquering death even before he rose from the dead because his body never even began the

process of decay. We have this comfort if we belong to Jesus Christ. His resurrection is not just a guarantee that we'll live, but a promise of his continuing presence now.

What do you say to this? Is your confession of faith only good as long as you have health and strength? I hope not. The confession of a true Christian looks beyond what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears. It takes refuge in the fact that we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, body and soul, both in life and in death. We belong to him because he has satisfied for all our sins and redeemed us from all the power of the devil and so preserves us that even the very hairs of our heads are protected by his sovereign power. Therefore, all things must work together for our good.

It's true that our bodies are walking corpses. The seeds of death have been in us since we were first conceived in our mother's wombs. And it doesn't take much to take us out of the world. It's no wonder that Paul exclaimed in Romans 7:24, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* He spoke as one who was tired of staring death in the face every single day. He longed to be made whole again. He knew he would be. In the next chapter he proclaimed that his wholeness is found in Jesus Christ, *for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death* (Rom. 8:2).

Do you see the hope of these words? After Jesus has walked with us through the valley of the shadow of death, his resurrection guarantees our own resurrection. And what a glorious resurrection it will be! Jesus said, *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation* (John 5:28–29).

David expressed his anticipation of the Lord's unfailing mercy in Psalm 16. He wrote, *Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust*, because he had been made alive in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The thought that I want to leave you with this evening is this: we know that Psalm 16 is a record of David's faith in God, but it is also a description of yours? I mean this in two ways.

First, David clearly saw death as a defeated and defanged enemy. Can you say the same thing? Maybe it's easy to agree to this right now while neither you nor those you love are facing the threat of imminent death. But suppose you were. Could you still rejoice that Jesus Christ conquered death?

One of the vows that parents make when they bring their children for baptism concerns death: if the Lord would call one of his covenant children home, would you accept his will? You can if you believe that God is gracious to the children of believers on the basis of his covenant and if you have a

firm and unyielding confidence in the resurrection. Every time we witness parents making this vow, we should reaffirm our commitment to these precious doctrines.

And second, David also lived in the light of his Savior's resurrection, trusting God to provide him with everything he needed for the sake of his Redeemer. Is that where you are? Do your days belong to the Lord? Do you find his grace sufficient in each and every one of them? David did. If you're a child of God, you need to do so too. Amen.