

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,
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 for evermore.

What title could we give this psalm?

“Confidence in the face of death”

What is the psalm’s basic structure?

Begins with petition, but the rest expresses the psalmist’s confidence in the Lord. This perhaps gives the motivation for the Lord to answer.

What problems are faced by the psalmist?

1. Acquaintances who follow other gods (v. 4)
2. Close encounter with death (vv. 9-10)

How is the psalm used later in the Bible?

In Acts 2:25-28 and Acts 13:35 Peter sees this as a prophecy of Jesus’ resurrection. It reflects the deep and developing Jewish faith in a Lord who can save from death in ways that go beyond what we can possibly imagine.

Suggested memory verse: v. 11

The verse may tell a story in pictures. The Lord first graciously shows the desperate psalmist the path to life. This is found supremely in the presence of the Lord (literally ‘your face’), who alone is the source of all life and joy. The right hand of God, like that of a patriarch or priest, then dispenses blessings and pleasures that will never come to an end. Access to where the Lord lives on high is the ultimate answer to the threat of death and the descent of the person to the underworld (vv. 9-10).

Contemporary reflections

Today people search for happiness, but do not find it because they miss the one who is the source of all joy. Many also seek to hide from or ignore death. The realism of the psalmist is to acknowledge the dread of death, but also to trust utterly in the God who promises the fullness of life that we celebrate this Easter season.

With thanks to the Revd Dr Philip Jenson, an expert on the Psalms.

Philip will be leading our traditional morning prayer service next Sunday.