

Psalms 18-11-01a

This is Thursday, the 1st of November, 2018. We continue our study in the Book of Psalms, and we are in Psalm 16, to which please turn. Psalm 16, we'll take a moment as is our custom to go to the Lord in prayer, ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and our reflection on the truth of His Word, and then we'll begin.

Shall we pray? Father, we do thank You for another opportunity to spend this time together and receive the blessings that come from Your Holy Spirit, the gifts that You have distributed to each one of us, the opportunity to share our enthusiasm for the place we occupy in Your plan, united with the Lord Jesus Christ, sharing a wonderful destiny, both now and in the ages to come. We thank You for this portion of Your Word and the opportunities that we have to make application of it in our daily experience. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, help each of us to understand it clearly and see its pertinence to our current circumstance, and cause it to be a part of the treasury of our souls, to equip us for every good work.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this is quite the fascinating Psalm, as you may remember.

It is quoted in the New Testament. It has two or three really familiar phrases in it or verses in it. And we began last time looking at it to see exactly what it says.

And there are some portions of the text that are a bit troubled. You'll remember the part about the holy ones and the nobles and the drink offerings of blood and so on there in verses two and three. And I will just remind you of my frequent personal rule of interpretation.

This is Sam's rule of interpretation number 17, which is if it seems susceptible to two different understandings because of something unavoidable, the text is very obviously troubled. In my view, if it could be this or it could be that, and God has left the text troubled, one of two things is true. Either there are enough clues in the context to figure out what it says, or you're supposed to take it both ways.

It's ambiguous for a reason. And sometimes ambiguity is a good thing. Our ambiguity, if you want fewer syllables.

I like ambiguity myself. But there are times when being too explicit isn't best. You want a generality.

I was referring to this in reference to a particular denominational statement of faith or credo that has some general statements about the Lord Jesus Christ, about eschatology, about things present, about things future. And it was crafted to fit on a single page and to allow people with a variety of specific beliefs. How many points of a Calvinist are you? What is your view of when the tribulation occurs? If you want to have a sufficiently big tent and not quibble over certain items of doctrine that are not necessarily central or foundational, I think they are solvable, and I

think you can commit to your own personal understanding.

But do you want to say, if you don't agree with my interpretation and my understanding, get out of the building? So what do you do? You craft a statement of faith that is sufficiently general that everybody's understanding can fit in. Am I going to break fellowship with somebody who thinks that we don't go up in the rapture until the middle of the tribulation? If they're a good, honest student of the Word of God and that's the conclusion they've come to, God bless them. I still want to talk to them.

I still want to sit next to them and sing out of the inspiring hymnal and such. I wouldn't say, well, if you're mid-trib, be gone. Go get the hence.

Get thee to a nunnery or something. Treat you all the same as a heathen, a tax collector, or a Catholic. There are some cases where ambiguity is a good thing because it allows you to group a number of things under the same heading.

Now, am I saying let's have multiple conflicting doctrinal understandings? No. I'm saying that you can have harmonious doctrinal understandings out of the same passage. You can see one thing or you can see another.

For example, Isaiah chapter 9, a virgin will conceive and bear a son. Can you understand that there was a child to be born in Isaiah's day who would be a sign? Can you also understand that it was a prophecy of the Lord Jesus? Both things are true. And this is why I look askance at the New King James capitalizing a virgin will conceive and bear a capital S son in Isaiah chapter 9, because that makes it only pertain to the Lord Jesus and not to the contemporaneous child that was born as a sign.

And before he knew his right hand from his left, the Pekah resident conspiracy would dissolve and all the rest of it, which manifestly doesn't apply to the Lord Jesus. So I begin by saying it's not always a bad thing for there to be more than one understanding of a particular passage, so long as it's not violating scripture. It's not contradictory.

They can be complimentary. It can be, is it A or is it B? And I say, yes, you've heard me do that time and again. And sometimes it's both and.

The reason I emphasize that now is I want to read something to you from Robert Alter. He did this translation of the Psalms. Matthew and I both have a copy of this and we enjoy looking at his take, but in the introduction, I want to read you something that is pertinent to this Psalm and some of the others that are coming up.

Textual errors cluster far more heavily in biblical poetry than in prose. A straightforward explanation for this difference offers itself. Biblical poetry uses a specialized poetic vocabulary incorporating many words that never occur in prose and in some instances are rare or archaic.

When a copyist is confronted with an unfamiliar word or idiom, he runs the risk of scrambling it

or substituting a more familiar term. Let us imagine for a moment, the poetry of T.S. Eliot was composed before the invention of the printing press, and so was exposed to the same kinds of scribal transmission errors our scripture are. So what would a poor scribe do when he encountered in this poem by T.S. Eliot called Sweeney Among the Nightingales the following line, swelling to maculate giraffe, swelling to maculate giraffe.

Many speakers of English, apart from zoologists and perhaps other scientists, have never seen or heard the word maculate. Our hypothetical scribe would be doing a perfectly natural thing if he replaced this puzzler either unconsciously or because he thought he was correcting an error with the familiar word immaculate. So he would end up with swelling to immaculate giraffe, right? He puts im on the front of maculate.

Well, what does immaculate mean? It means spotless. So if a giraffe is maculate, what does he got? Spots. Maculate means spotted.

But you can see that for a rare word, somebody would be tempted to fix it. This has happened a lot in the course of transmission of certain portions of the Old Testament. In particular, we have difficulty because we don't have too many texts to go back to.

We've got a Greek translation that was done hundreds of years after the originals were all written. So in many cases, we have a task of reconstruction. I thought that was a good example.

And how often can you work the word maculate into anyway. So I say that to say this. Look at the first part of Psalm 16.

Preserve me, O God, for in you I put my trust. This is the thematic statement for this Psalm. Preserve me, O God, because I've put my trust in you.

I am trusting you and I'm relying on you to preserve me. That's the thought. Everything else is going to in some way connect to that.

It's like the old wooden wagon wheels. That's the hub. Everything else is going to at least be connected by a spoke.

So you get to verses two and three. Oh, my soul is in italics. We cross that out.

It's not in the original. You have said to the Lord, you are my Lord. My goodness is nothing apart from you.

Well, this is an easy fix. And even in the Greek, this is, I have said. So our first correction is you can, oh, my soul basically does the same thing as fixing this to say, I have said.

This restates the thought in verse one. So we're not on any kind of shaky doctrinal ground here. We are reaffirming and David is reaffirming what he said in the first verse.

In you I have put my trust. I have said to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no goodness beside

you or besides you.

Now, you can take that a number of different ways. God's righteousness is so far advanced beyond David's that his goodness is as nothing compared to the Lord's or any goodness that David has comes from God. You could take it either way in this poetic line.

So which does it mean? Think about my introduction. Isn't it true that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags compared to the Lord's righteousness? Isn't it true that we have no righteousness apart from him? So both ideas pertain. Both ideas work.

Both are equally legitimate ways to take this line. Now look at the next. As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.

Well, you can say he's just happy to be in a crowd of fellow believers, but when you look at this in Hebrew, that's really a stretch. And again, in the same way that we had to change the pronoun in verse two from you have said to I have said, basically what verse three is saying is there are saintly ones, there are kadoshim, there are those who are considered to be as holy as it gets, and there are those who are considered to be as noble as it gets. That's what the excellent ones are.

Remember, it means kings, nobles, those who are at the pinnacle of political power. So this is the pinnacle of spiritual power, the pinnacle of political power. What is the key, and you can circle it here in verse three, in the land.

You have it translated on the earth. This is Baha Eretz in the land, Eretz Yisrael, land of Israel. These are the ones on the earth, in the land, on the surface of the planet, considered to be holy and powerful, holy and noble, influential, the leadership in the spiritual realm, the leadership in the material realm.

And it says, in whom is all my delight. One of two things is true. Either David, is is not in the text.

So either he used to have all of his delight in it, or this is another one of those slight aberrations. And what they're saying is that these in the land, all of their delight is in holiness and political power in the land. I want to be considered holy in the land.

Do you remember the Pharisees on the street corners making a big show of dropping their money in and making long prayers? I want to be considered holy in the land. I want to be, I am, kadoshim. I'm the pinnacle of righteousness.

All these things I have done from my youth. And those who are in political power, the elders, the scribes, those who are in charge of the land, and that's their delight. That's what they put their trust in.

That's what they are in the next verse. Their sorrows shall be multiplied, who hasten after another. You can cross out God, but hasten is the word used that means to betroth, to make a

covenant with, to pursue and take as an object of desire.

So just with, because we've got a little problem with the connecting words and some of the suffixes here. Here's the big idea in verses three and four. There are people in the land who are somehow occupied with earthly holiness and earthly power.

David says sorrow is going to come to them because that's what they've made their covenant with. That's, you know how we say, you've made your bed. Sort of a marital analogy here.

You've made your bed. Now you've got to lie in it. You know, you've betrothed yourself to this.

Now you're stuck with it. This is the idea. We don't have to parse.

I knocked myself out for probably three hours trying to make sense out of this text, and you can retrovert it into the old Hebrew and do a bunch of things to try to figure out what happened. It finally dawned on me, if God has left it that ambiguous, I probably don't need to figure out which one it was. Let's see what is the general idea that is certainly pertinent and certainly scriptural, and that's it.

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, is in a nutshell what these two verses are saying. If you're depending for your holiness, if you're depending for your influence on things in the land, things on the ground, things on the earth, you are destined for sorrow. And this word for sorrow is often used for physical pain.

It is going to be painful sooner or later if that's what you're pursuing. So that's verses three and four in a nutshell, and David says at the close of verse four, their libations of blood I will not pour. What does this mean? For them to go after and betroth themselves to this holiness and this influence, something is dying, and they're ending up pouring out that blood.

Remember how Isaiah begins with a long condemnation of those who join house to house and land to land and gain their prosperity on the backs of the poor, and they're leaving cleat marks on those around them as they climb to the top. This is the idea. It's a libation of blood.

In order to worship that, they're going to have to hit pound two. So call blockers, what a wonderful invention. That number will never ring here again.

If you've been listening on Thursday nights, that same thing calls us every Thursday night, never again. Anyway, that's not what I was talking about. The idea that there is a sacrifice of somebody else and you're basically pouring out their blood in the interest of your own happiness.

I mean, you can make application of this any way you want, whether it's abortion or whether it's prosperity of some. A hundred years ago, we had sweatshops and child labor and somebody else's blood is being poured out as a libation in the interest of this kind of holiness and this kind of power on the earth. And David says, I'll have no part of that.

And I won't even name their names. It'll never come across my lips. That's verses three and four.

Look at the contrast. David looks to God for his preservation. David says, I have put my trust in you, not on things on the earth.

I'm not relying on human mechanisms, human influence, human standards of acceptance. Being holy and kadosh means to be acceptable. So I've made myself acceptable.

I'm in the in crowd. I've connected with the influential stuff in the land. David says, not me.

I will not offer those sacrificial libations, somebody else's blood, nor will I take up their names on my lips. Oh Lord, you are the portion of my inheritance and my cup. Notice the contrast of the cup instead of a cup of blood being poured out that somebody did in the land.

He says, you are my portion. You are my cup. You preserve my inheritance.

You maintain my lot is in Hebrews the same thing as you are the one who preserves my inheritance. Now, how would you preserve your inheritance here on the earth? Maybe you're the, you know, daughters of Zelophehad or something, and you're concerned that you're going to lose your land. What do you have to do? Well, you've either got to go to the church or the state, right? You've got to go to somebody that's got influence and say, don't let them take my land.

How many westerns have been launched on that theme? You know, poor Mrs. So-and-so's husband died, and oh, the evil mustache twiddling bank man is going to come and take my land. Don't let him take my... Well, you have to go to somebody with influence or with standing in the community for relief. And David says, no, the Lord preserves my inheritance.

Well, what court of appeal are you going to go to above God? And he says, the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. These are the cords that were used to measure out allotments. We even do this today when they're going to make a new housing development or wherever they go out there.

The surveyor goes out and he pounds in stakes and he wraps a brightly colored line around it and stretches in between. He says, okay, this lot is here and this lot is here and this lot is here. Well, those lines, David says, have fallen to me in pleasant places.

Yes, I have a good inheritance. Now, what kind of inheritance is he talking about? He says, oh Lord, in verse five, you are the portion of my inheritance. So where are these cords? What is this demarcation? This is the portion of God's fellowship, God's grace, God's attention that falls to David.

He says, he's talking about his spiritual inheritance, his relationship with God inheritance. And using the metaphor of an earthly land allotment, he says, the attention that you give me, the

portion of you that I enjoy is pleasant. It's like getting a beautiful piece of farmland that's got a little creek running through it and a gentle rise and a meadow and some trees and it's just a beautiful piece of ground.

He says, you as my allotment, I've got a wonderful portion. It's a thing of beauty. I have a goodly inheritance.

So in verse seven, I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel. My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. Sometimes we have lives that are so busy in the daytime that we can't really do our planning and analysis until we're forced to stop work by the night or fatigue or rain or whatever it might be.

And you're forced to be still. And that's when you get a chance to kind of fall back and regroup and do the kind of thinking and planning that is required. Well, he says that his counsel and his instruction are from the Lord through his heart, in his heart.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. And we talked last time about the fact that sometimes things are too many for us. Sometimes guidance from scripture is a bit opaque because we're not far enough along to understand maybe advanced, finer points of doctrinal application.

And it's okay if you're in the sixth grade and you're just getting the introduction to algebra, maybe seventh or eighth grade. I don't remember when they did that. They probably do it in kindergarten now.

But when you're getting introductions to algebra in your younger life, they don't expect you to do differential equations and find the area under a curve and all of that. You're not ready for that. You don't pick up a college textbook and say, well, I've had four or five years of mathematical instruction now, so this ought to be duck soup.

You're not ready for that. So what do we do? We fall back on what we know. Just like in these verses, if the text is a bit uncertain or a bit obscure, what do I know for sure? Anything that we've covered in these first six verses, any of the deductions and interpretations that we've made is any of that out of keeping with any fundamental doctrine that we know.

On the contrary, it reflects everything we know, right? And maybe at some future point, somebody will find an ancient scrap of leather that's got the original pristine text of this and we can make an advance on it. But this is what we know. And I have some confidence that this is what it means and what we should bring away from it because of something we're going to see in the second session tonight.

But for now, it's a good principle. If it looks a little bit complicated or a little bit obscure, what do we do? Well, maybe I'm not ready for that. Let me fall back on what I do know.

Let me get back to my fundamentals. Fundamentals of your tennis swing. Fundamentals of

your baseball swing.

Fundamentals of your golf swing. Fundamentals of your sight alignment and trigger control. If you're dealing with firearms, you can't figure out why your groups are, you can't cover them with a trash can lid and you're only 15 feet away.

Well, let's go back to the fundamentals. Go back to that. So what is David basically saying? And why did we have this sort of strange interlude of people in the land? It's a contrast.

What's the choice if you don't make the Lord your portion, if you don't put your trust in him, if you aren't looking to him as your inheritance and as your portion and as the one who secures your future? The inheritance speaks of the future, doesn't it? I receive this and I'm going to have it in perpetuity and pass it on to my descendants. An inheritance is something you keep and perpetuate, right? It's not a consumable. So what does this mean? Well, you can either concentrate on the temporal and the immediate and the short term and the human and that which depends on the vagaries of what is in the land or you can latch on to what is eternal.

And David makes that contrast. He says, I am placing my trust in the Lord. He is my portion.

He is my inheritance. I'm not worried about what's in the land. You could imagine David composing this psalm after a night or two of being away from Jerusalem after Absalom took over.

You could imagine him composing this in the cave of Adullam when Saul has been hounding him. He says, but I thought I was the anointed king of Israel and look at me. I'm living like a fugitive.

I can't return to my family plot there in Bethlehem. Can't go back to my home and my friends. I'm a fugitive.

So what does he say? There are people who have all of their security and all of their self worth in what's in the land. I'm putting all of that in the Lord and it doesn't matter where I am and it doesn't matter what's going on. These people are basically pouring out cups of blood.

And you remember, even in the sacrificial rites that are in Leviticus, what happens to the blood of the sacrifice? What does the priest do with the blood of an offering? Leviticus 1 through 6 and 7 and on down the priestly instructions in the chapters following. Where does the blood of the sacrifice go? It's poured out on the ground at the base of the altar. It goes back to the ground.

Well, David says you can't get too much into this world. You can't be too invested in this life. And I'm not going to just pour libations into the ground.

I'm looking up. I'm looking heavenward. I'm looking eternally.

And this is a valid and necessary understanding from this psalm and we'll see why. So, I will

bless the Lord who has given me counsel. If I need guidance on how to navigate this earth, the rocks and shoals, the slings and arrows, the vagaries of people who are faithful or unfaithful, who are friendly or who are foes, the Lord gives me counsel and I receive instruction in my heart in the night seasons.

Verse 8, I have set the Lord always before me. Wake up in the morning and look out the tent flap or look out the mouth of the cave. You'd be tempted to say, well, my day today is going to be dictated by the land and the people of the land, those who are powerful and influential in the land.

David says, I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. It's not armor.

It's not men. It's not strategy. It's not having the high ground.

The Lord is at my right hand. That is what fixes me in place and keeps me secure. Therefore, verse 9, my heart is glad and my glory rejoices.

It's an interesting turn of phrase, my glory rejoices. What is glory representing here? Glory, obviously, is a quality or an attribute. So it doesn't have personality or a thought process.

So how can it rejoice? Well, we're in poetry here, right? And my heart is glad and my glory rejoices. Glory is recognition of accomplishment, right? Why does the Lord Jesus have glory? Why is He glorious? It's two things. It's who He is and what He has done.

David says, everything that I am and everything I have done is subordinate to the Lord. It is because of the Lord. It is in the Lord.

It is for the Lord. And so my glory, anything that pertains to me that is well thought of, rejoices in the Lord. That's the implication.

It's a word I'm looking for here. Yeah, well, it'll come to me. It's implicit in it.

And so my glory rejoices, that's in the now. You know, what did they whisper? They had a slave standing in the chariot behind a victorious Roman general as he came into the big parade into Rome. Remember, they always had a slave standing behind him.

Do you remember what he would say? This is, sometimes it's the only, it's the only Latin anybody knows. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, right? Which is not very good Latin pronunciation, but I don't care. *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

What does it mean? The glory of this earth fades, passes away. Transit. Transit means it moves along, right? Transit authority moves you along, buses, trains, et cetera.

Sic transit gloria, the glory of the *mundi*, the world. So David says, my heart is glad right now. And my earthly glory, such as I may have, is not tied to the land.

It's not tied to the kadoshim. It's not tied to the the adyarim, the nobles and the holy in the land, back up there in verse three. My glory, what's another verse we have? Let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me.

You can say, you can help me out here. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, but let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me. I am the Lord, which exercise righteousness, judgment, and mercy in the earth, et cetera, right? Let him that glories, glory in this.

So David says, my glory rejoices. Now that's in the present. What about the future? My flesh also will rest in trust.

This says hope, and there's a good reason for it. It's translated into Greek with the word elpis, which is hope. But this is the Hebrew word you see it there, Matt? Batak.

Batak means to trust, to trust. My flesh rests in trust. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption.

You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption. Now what's going on here? Does this mean that it's like the Apostle John and David thinks he's never going to die? The interesting thing here is you remember we had Holy Ones up in verse three, the saints, the kadoshim, and holy, or Holy One is usually kadosh. This is not kadosh.

This is kasid. Kasid. Kasid comes from kesed.

What is kesed? What's our two-word sort of gloss, our quick definition for kesed? Loyal love, right? Loyal love. Kesed. Grace is the single word.

Kesed. So you will not allow your loyal and loving one. See, this is, if you say Holy One, you say, well, he's got some quality of holiness that qualifies them for not seeing corruption.

But this is kesed. This is someone who, and it restates what he says earlier about resting in batak. Batak is not just sort of a passive hope, it's an active trust.

And kesed is not a passive holiness, it's an active, loyally loving believer. You see the difference? There's action, there is initiative, there is intentionality in batak and in kesed. You become these things.

You become one who trusts, and you become one who is expressing kesed, expressing loyal love by conscious thought, conscious decision, constant activity. We avail ourselves of God's grace in becoming these things. So, you will not leave my soul in sheol, nor will you allow your kesed, your faithful one, to see corruption.

You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. Remember up in verse 9, he said, my glory here rejoices.

There's rejoicing in glory, in accomplishment, in faithfulness and obedience that God blesses, that becomes a blessing to others. There's wonderful things that happen in this life when we are in the center of God's will, when we're doing what we're supposed to do. There is glory here.

There's attainment and accomplishment. And we can see that God has worked in us and through us to accomplish his good purpose. And that's glory.

And our glory rejoices here. But where is the fullness of rejoicing? Where is the fullness of joy? In God's presence, which is in the future. This is in God's presence, fullness of joy.

At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. And this goes back to verse 8. Here on the earth, who is at whose right hand? What does it say in verse 8? God is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Because things are trying to move me.

There's something pushing. I've got resistance, right? But God is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. But one day, I'll be at his right hand.

And that's the pinnacle. That's the ultimate, to be at his right hand. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Well, this is the text of the Psalm. This is the meaning of the Psalm at first blush. It makes good sense in the life of David at a number of different points.

It's great for personal application. Because what is the application? Anytime I start getting down, anytime I start feeling whelmed or overwhelmed, anytime my little hamster trips and winds up upside down at the bottom of the wheel, anytime it seems as though people who have taken a different path and have wired things together in the earthly realm, you know, did I miss it? Was I so heavenly minded I was no earthly good? David says, if you covenant and pursue and tie yourself to that kind of earthly solution, it is the path of sorrow. It is the path of pain.

Here is what I have done. I have said to the Lord, you're my inheritance. You are my insurance.

You are my future. You are my allotment and my portion. I am looking forward to the day when I can be at your right hand.

In the meantime, you are at my right hand, and I don't have to worry about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and all of these things that are pushing at me and trying to dislodge me. You will preserve me now, and you will not allow me to be conquered even by death. You will not leave me in Sheol.

I'm not going to rot away and be gone. There will be pleasures at your right hand forevermore, and it is batak. It is expectation.

It is qasid. It is trust and loyalty to that which is unseen. The earthly kadosh, the earthly nobility,

is all in the visible and in the mortal and in the material and the immediate and in the short term.

Everybody David was talking about and looking at when he composed these lines is dead and dust. Who is going to prevail? Who is going to have an eternal inheritance? David and we, if we think like he did. Now, because this is such a wonderful composition, it is quoted in the New Testament, and we don't have to rely only on Psalm 16 in the Old Testament to get its import and its meaning.

So we are going to pause here and take our break, and when we come back, we're going to see how Peter and Paul make use of this Psalm after Pentecost in the church age specifically for us. And it's a wonderful thing, so don't go away. We'll be right back.