

“The Psalm of the Resurrection” (An Exposition of Psalm 16)¹

Introduction

This Easter morning we are looking at one of the most important Old Testament passages dealing with the resurrection of Jesus Christ - Psalm 16. The Old Testament may *not* be the *first* thing that comes to your mind when you think about the resurrection of Jesus, but His death and resurrection are the subject of *all* of Scripture, *not* just the New Testament.

This Psalm of David is *the Psalm of the resurrection*. When I say that I do *not* mean just the idea of the resurrection in a *general* sense, but first and foremost that of Jesus Christ in particular. In this Psalm, written approximately 1,000 years before the time of Christ, David prophesies concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ! Think about that.

In fact, Psalm 16 may very well be the clearest explicit prophecy of the resurrection of Christ in the entire Old Testament.² Just as Psalm 22 could be considered the Psalm of the Cross, even so Psalm 16 can be considered *the Psalm of the Resurrection*.

Prophecy of the Resurrection of Christ

Have you ever considered that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy? This should not surprise us, should it? Hear what the Apostle Peter had to say about Old Testament prophecy - in 1 Peter 1:10-12 he writes,

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted *the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”

So what was the primary message of the prophets in the Old Testament? Was it just the end times, as we so often think to be the case? No, unless you conceive of the end times as being centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter tells us there that the prophets prophesied **“concerning this salvation”** that we have by faith in Jesus Christ (v.10). In other words, the Old Testament is about the *gospel* too, not just the New Testament! Peter also tells us that the prophets **“prophesied about the *grace* that was to be yours”** in Jesus Christ (v.10). There is *grace* to be found in the prophetic books!

And how is the message of the prophets about the gospel of God's grace? Because they focus primarily on two things - **“*the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*”** (v.11). The **“sufferings of Christ”** include *everything* He suffered in our place for our salvation, especially the death of the cross! His **“glories”** include everything from the *resurrection* to His *ascension*, and everything that follows.

1 All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

2 James Boice writes, “If ever there was a clear Old Testament prophecy of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is this statement.” (*Acts*, Vol. 1, p.130)

After His resurrection the Lord Jesus Himself said the very same thing! In Luke 24:25-27 Jesus is talking to a couple of disciples who were despondent because of His death and did not yet understand or believe that He had risen from the dead. There Luke writes,

“And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe *all that the prophets have spoken!* Was it not necessary that the Christ should *suffer these things* and enter into *his glory?*” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

In other words, they should have known. And they should have known because these things (the sufferings and glory of Christ) were foretold in the Old Testament! I wonder if Jesus spoke of Psalm 16 to those disciples!

And listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4,

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the Scriptures.*”

So Paul there reminds us of *the* most important things that he preached and taught, the truths that he “received” and had been entrusted to proclaim – **“that Christ died for our sins”** (v.3), that He was *buried*, and that **“he was raised on the third day”** (v.4). Those things are the heart and heartbeat of Christianity, they are *the central truths and main points of all of sacred Scripture*. So let us be sure that we are *keeping the main thing the main thing*. These are the things that Paul says are **“of first importance”** (v.3).

And notice that Paul does *not* just say that Christ *died*, but that He died **“for our sins”** (v.3). The historical facts of the death and resurrection of Christ are vitally important and must be affirmed, proclaimed, and believed. Christianity is a religion grounded firmly in real history. But the theology of the cross, the thing that makes it *good news* to sinners like us, is *not* just that Jesus *died*, but that He **“died for our sins.”** Do you believe that Jesus died for *you*, for *your* sins?

And what phrase does Paul use *twice* in that passage regarding the death and resurrection of Christ? *Twice* there he says that His death and resurrection were **“in accordance with the Scriptures.”** In other words, they are the *subject* of, and the *fulfillment* of, Old Testament prophecy.

The Psalm of the Resurrection

On what basis are we to conclude that Psalm 16 in particular is a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ? How do we know that Psalm 16 is the Psalm of the resurrection? In the book of Acts both the Apostle *Peter* (Acts 2:25-32) and the Apostle *Paul* (Acts 13:35-37) quote from and interpret this Psalm as speaking primarily of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! In Acts 13:31 Paul plainly says that in this Psalm David **“foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”**

We will *not* be touching on every verse or phrase in this Psalm today, but rather will concentrate most of our time upon v.8-11, the verses that the Apostle Peter quotes and interprets for us in Acts chapter 2.

In Acts 2:22-32 Luke records for us the words of the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost – the very *first Christian sermon*, so to speak:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. *God raised him up*, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. *For David says concerning him,*

**“I saw *the Lord* always before me,
for *he* is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’**

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, *he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ*, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”

Again, David was writing of Jesus Christ and His resurrection on the 3rd day in Psalm 16, some 1,000 years before it took place! David said these things “concerning him” (i.e. Jesus)!

The first thing that we should notice about Peter's sermon is that it was biblical. That is, he had something to say to this crowd, and what he had to say about Jesus Christ was based upon Old Testament Scripture.

Think about what that means for a moment. The Bible - a book that was written by about 40 authors over a period of about 1,500 years in different languages is somehow unified in its central message. And that message is about one person. Not only that, but *much* of what we find in Scripture about Jesus was written *well over a thousand years* before His birth, earthly ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. There is simply no human explanation for that. The Bible is *supernatural* in origin – that is to say, it is *divine* in origin; it is from God.

The words of the Psalm were written in the first person – David is the speaker. In v.8-9 he says,

**“I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.”**

Why would David not be shaken? Why was his heart glad? Why did his whole being rejoice? Why did his flesh also dwell secure? Because of the resurrection of Christ, which he speaks of in verse 10.

There he writes,

**“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.”**

Peter explains that here David was not speaking of himself, but of Christ. He reminds his hearers that King David was *not* raised from the dead; *his* body saw corruption (v.29). But God raised **“this Jesus”**(v.32) up from the dead. *His* flesh did not see corruption.

Here is Peter's inspired commentary on Psalm 16:

Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, *he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ*, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” (Acts 2:30-32)

David was not just a king, but a prophet as well. And when he wrote this Psalm he did so **“knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne”** (v.30). This is a reference to the *Davidic covenant* (2 Samuel 7:1-17). His hope was in the promise and oath of God that He **“would set one of his descendants on his throne”** forever. And based upon that, Peter tells us that David **“*foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption*”** (v.31).

Conclusion

This Psalm should give us confidence in the *Bible*, that it really is the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient Word of God.

This Psalm should also give us confidence in the *promise of the resurrection* – that whoever believes in Christ, though he die, yet he shall live! The resurrection of Christ should make our hearts glad and our whole beings rejoice, for our flesh dwells secure in Christ. Charles Spurgeon writes,

“This is noble encouragement to all the saints; die they must, but rise they shall, and though in their case they shall see corruption, yet they shall rise to everlasting life. Christ's resurrection is the cause, the earnest, the guarantee, and the emblem of the rising of all his people. Let them, therefore, go to their graves as to their beds, resting their flesh among the clods as they now do upon their couches.”³

Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have *you* turned to Him by faith so that you (as Spurgeon said) are able to go to *your* grave as to *your* bed, and rest your flesh under the dirt as you do now upon your couch? Die you must, but rise to eternal life you shall, if you are in Christ!

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

3 *The Treasury of David*, Vol. I (Part 1), p.197