

I want to use Psalm 16 to conclude the mini series on Psalms. Two incidents in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ prompt me to do it. I am sure we know well of the seven prayers or seven sayings of Jesus on the Cross. In one of the prayers, Jesus cried, *'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?'* You may think that anyone in the situation of Jesus, would utter the same words of agony. However, we know these words of Jesus were in fact the opening verse of Psalm 22. Often we think that with these words, He died in despair. It may give that impression. However, if we believe Jesus really repeated the opening words of Psalm 22, then we have a totally different understanding of these words. In the same Psalm, a later verse has these words, *'When he cried unto Him, he heard'* (v.24). So we can see that in Jesus' mind these were not words of despair, but words of trust in God. In fact these words express the most intimate communion He had with God.

The second incident was to be found in Jesus' resurrection appearance to his disciples. They were in a locked room for fear of the Jews. Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. They were utterly scared because they thought they had seen a ghost. Jesus calmed them down and explained to them that He had risen from the dead. Then Jesus said to them, *'This is what I meant by saying, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms was bound to be fulfilled.'* (Luke 24:44) As we have seen in the first incident, our Lord Jesus Himself nourished His own spiritual life by meditation on the Psalms. Quotations from them came so easily to his lips that He must have known them by heart.

In short, if one book from the Old Testament is selected to be bound up with the New Testament as a little book, it is the book of Psalms. For here more than in any part of the Bible we find language fitting and ready for use in addressing God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every religion has its outward and inner expression. In Israel, the outward expression of worship is the temple and its sacrificial system. But the outward expression is at the same time tied up with the inner expression. Many of the Psalms are closely related to the worship of the temple. In other words, it reveals to us that true worship was no mere formal round of sacrifices, but that it was linked to some of the deepest experiences of the people. Let me reiterate what I said in my introductory sermon on Psalms: *If we wish to pray, there is no better*

*method than to study the Psalms carefully, and to use them as the expression of personal devotion.*

So this morning let us look at Psalm 16. The theme of this Psalm is hope on resurrection. Why do I say that? Because it is the first Psalm the early disciples quoted as evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter in the Pentecostal sermon quoted it as recorded in Acts 2.25-28: *'For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*" Likewise, Paul in his first missionary journey preached at Antioch in Pisidia, also quoted Psalm 16: *'Therefore he has also said in another psalm, "You will not let your Holy One experience corruption.'*" (Acts 13.35) I believe Peter quoted this psalm because he must have heard it from Jesus in his resurrection appearance to them. And subsequently Paul heard it from the apostles' preaching.

If you read the Old Testament, two striking things may come to your mind. There seems to have no clear hope of eternal life. But, at the same time, the Jews believe that men continue to exist after death in the gloomy shadow-world of Sheol. But this cannot be called life because in Sheol a man is cut off for ever from the living presence of God. In another Psalm it says, *'the dead praise not the Lord, neither any that goes down into silence'* (Psalm 115:17). You see, the Jews believe that the personal immortality is closely tied up with the idea of the survival of the nation; an idea shared by the Chinese. As long as the nation exists there is hope of one's immortality. That is why the re-establishment of Israel in 1948 gave such a great hope to the Jews.

But this does not mean that the Old Testament does not contain any hope of personal survival. Psalm 16 helps us to see the beginning of this hope. The Bible does not teach 'the natural immortality of the soul'; that was a Greek idea. It does, however, teach that the fellowship of the human soul with God is something that cannot be touched by the death of the body. In this Psalm, the poet has put his trust in God, and yet he has been allowed to pass through a time of deep and terrible trouble. He cannot believe that this is the last word, and that his sense of separation from God is to have no end. It may be that his hope did not extend

beyond the restoration of God's favour in this life. But it may also be that the restoration of God's favour be extended to next life.

I think that is exactly what Jesus believed. When Jesus taught his disciples about his resurrection, He must have given Psalm 16 as an evidence. But I don't think Jesus would have taught them that his resurrection was a natural event or a kind of magic. As soon as Jesus entered into ministry He realized that, in order to obey God's will, he had to pass through suffering and even death. And in his thought about his imminent suffering and death, Psalm 16 would have been a great comfort and encouragement to him. It really encouraged Jesus to come to the conclusion. It made Jesus believe that if He had a perfect and unfailing fellowship with God, then death would not be the end of everything. In the belief of Jesus, resurrection is the consequence of His perfect and unfailing fellowship with God.

In the last six months the world has witnessed the horrible ravage of Covid-19. Up to this present moment, it does not seem to have abated. The Victoria government has started a mass media advertisement to alert people to the severity of this virus, in order that Victorians should follow the health protocol. The church must support the government's policy. But, as an Anglican priest, I believe the church must have its own message at this pandemic time. The church should let people know how we treat death if it occurs rather unpleasantly and unavoidably. What I know is that as Christians, we should not hold a wishy-washy view of life after death. Neither do we believe, as most people think, that death is the end of everything. For us, the hope of resurrection is no longer a wishful thinking because 2,000 years ago it became a reality in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Whatever the future holds for us, for better or for worse, one thing we strive to do is to remain in constant fellowship with Jesus because that is how our hope for the future will one day become reality.