

An Easter Hymn

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could for a short while this morning if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 16. I'd like us to just walk through this Psalm but if we just read again the closing verses from verse 8.

So Psalm 16, reading again at verse 8. I have said 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. For you will not abandon my soul to the grave or let your holy one seek corruption.

You make known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy at your right hand our pleasure forevermore.

At your right hand our pleasure forevermore. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

[1 : 0 8] What is your only comfort in life and in death? You know as the coronavirus continues to spread and the death toll continues to rise and with our busy lives being halted and everything in lockdown and everyone in self-isolation.

You know this is the question that I've been asking myself over the past couple of weeks. What is your only comfort in life and in death? Because you know when everything is taken from you and when everything is taken out of your control what are you left with?

When your independence and your interests and even your income when they're all stripped from you and you're left in isolation what have you got? When this global pandemic sweeps across our world causing confusion and chaos and crisis and even claiming lives what is your comfort in life and in death?

As many of you will know this question is the first question in the Heidelberg Catechism and it's the most important question which you need to answer.

What is your only comfort in life and in death? And the answer is not your family, your friends, your finances or even your physical well-being because as we've been reminded over the past few weeks all these things are fragile.

[2 : 3 7] Of course our only comfort in life and in death can be in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that's what the Heidelberg Catechism affirms to us.

What is your only comfort in life and in death? And the answer that's given is that I with body and soul am not my own but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins and delivered me from the power of the devil and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head yet all things must be subservient to my salvation and therefore by his Holy Spirit he assures me of eternal life and makes me sincerely willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.

You know my friend what is your only comfort in life and in death? You know it's not only the Heidelberg Catechism that answers that question.

David answers that question here in Psalm 16 because what David says is that we'll only find comfort in life and in death when we consider and when we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And you know David was able to make that claim because Psalm 16 is an Easter hymn. Psalm 16 is an Easter hymn. In fact, Psalm 16 it presents to us one of the clearest and oldest prophecies about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 16] It's an Easter hymn. It's a hymn about the empty tomb. And more than that we're told there in the title that this Easter hymn is a mictam of David.

It's a mictam of David and the word mictam in the title it means inscription. It's an inscription of David. And what the title of this Easter hymn is reminding us is that the words of this hymn should be inscribed or engraved on stone for all to see.

Or still these words should be etched in our minds and written in our hearts because they impress upon us the reality that our only comfort in life and in death is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And in this Easter hymn David confesses that his only comfort in life and in death is in a divine protection, a divine provision, and a divine promise.

David says that his only comfort in life and in death is in a divine provision, a divine protection, a divine provision and a divine promise.

[5 : 32] So we look firstly at a divine protection. David says his only comfort in life and in death is in a divine protection. He says in verse 1, preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no good apart from you. As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply.

They drink offerings of blood. I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. David opens this Easter hymn with a prayer, preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

And it's such a beautiful request, because David's opening words of this hymn are keep me. That's what he says. Keep me, preserve me, protect me, guard me, watch over me.

My friend, David's only comfort in life and in death was in the divine protection of the God who keeps him. Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

[6 : 42] Keep me. You know, we saw that word, didn't we? We saw last Lord's Day when we began studying 1 Peter. And we said that the word keep, it's a military term, which illustrates the idea of a soldier.

He's a soldier who's standing on guard. With a soldier, he's keeping the area safe. He's guarding it with his life. He's watching carefully over it.

And he's providing protection and ultimately, the preservation of life. And you know, as Peter sought to encourage the Christian Church, as we saw last week in 1 Peter, he sought to encourage them by reminding them and us that in Christ, we are blessed because we're being kept.

We're blessed because we're being kept. And Peter affirmed to us that we're being kept, not by our inner strength or our own resolve or even our ability to keep ourselves, but that we're being kept by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And you know, it's the same assurance that's given to us in Psalm 121 that we're kept. It's the same word. The Psalmist in Psalm 121, he encourages us to lift our eyes beyond the valleys and the hills of this world and we're to lift our eyes to the Lord because he's the maker of heaven and earth.

[8 : 08] And the Psalmist says we're to look to him because he's our keeper. He's the one who promises to keep us and guard us and watch over us and protect us and preserve us as his people.

And he promises, we're told, that he will keep our going out and our coming in from the moment we lift our eyes to him and forevermore.

But you know, the Lord is not only our keeper. That's what I love about the Bible, how it's all connected. The Lord is not only our keeper. He prays that we'll be kept.

We see that in Jesus as high priestly prayer, don't we, in John 17, where Jesus prays, Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

And you know, it was because of Jesus' prayer in John 17 that Jude, one of the last books in the New Testament, Jude, who was the brother of Jesus, it's because of the prayer of Jesus that Jude, the brother of Jesus, could say to these Christians in the early church that they've been called by Jesus.

[9 : 19] They've been loved by Jesus and they're being kept by Jesus. And then you remember that Jude, he concluded that his short letter, short but beautiful letter, with those wonderful words of benediction, he said, now unto him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before his glory with exceeding joy to the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen. And you know, my friend, that's where David's only comfort in life and in death was, it was in the God who keeps him, the God who keeps him, keep me, oh God, for in you I take refuge.

And my friend, is that not the hope of the gospel? That those who are in Christ, those who have come to Jesus Christ by faith, we are trusting in his divine protection.

Because like David, we have the assurance that whatever circumstances or situations we may be facing today or in the future, we have a divine protection.

We have a divine protection. Of course, having a divine protection doesn't mean that we're going to be trouble free in life. It doesn't mean that we're not going to fall into sin or experience sickness or endure suffering or encounter sorrow.

[10 : 49] But it does mean that we can't trust in anything else. We can't trust in our feelings, our friends, our family, our finances or even our physical well-being.

Because all these things, they are fragile and they're not like the Lord. Because as David says, the Lord is our refuge. He's our refuge to his people, giving them divine protection.

And you know, my friend, with every other protection being removed from us at the moment, we're being made to see that we need this divine protection and we need it more than ever.

Because our only comfort in life and in death, it can be in the God who keeps us. That's why we need to make the same confession as David did in verse two.

He said, I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no good apart from you. David made the confession of the Christian where he said openly and outwardly, you are my Lord.

[11 : 56] You are my Lord. Is that your confession, my friend? Is that your confession? Can you say about the Lord? You are my Lord. You are my Lord.

Because you know, David, he knew and every Christian knows that without the Lord in your life, you have no good thing. That's what he says. You are my Lord. I have no good apart from you.

Without the Lord in your life, you have no good. You have no comfort, no grace, no salvation. Without the Lord, you have no safety, no security and no shelter.

But with the Lord, with the Lord, you lack nothing. That's why there's nothing else worth clinging to or finding comfort in than in the divine protection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know, it's with that that David actually, he seeks to make a contrast between those who seek this divine protection and those who spurn it. Those who seek it and those who spurn it.

[12 : 59] He says in verse three, as for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply.

They drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. David says that the saints, those who seek the Lord and shelter under his divine protection and safety and security, he says they are the excellent ones.

They are the righteous ones. They are the glorious ones. They are the ones who are kept by the power of God and have comfort both in life and in death. But David says that for those who seek the Lord and don't seek the Lord but seek after other gods, he says they will find no safety, no shelter, no security.

They'll only find sorrow. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply. That's what he says. They'll have sorrow in this life and at death their sorrows will be multiplied.

You know the word sorrows there in Marsh 4 means the sorrows of death. Meaning not only physical death but spiritual death and eternal death.

[14 : 21] Their sorrows shall be multiplied. And you know my unconverted friend, that's why you need to seek the Lord's safety, shelter and security.

That's why you need to openly and outwardly confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. That's why you need the words of this Easter hymn etched in your mind and written upon your heart because your only comfort in life and in death can be found in this divine protection.

A divine protection through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So we see a divine protection. But secondly we see a divine provision.

A divine provision, so a divine protection and a divine provision. Look at verse five. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup.

You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel in the night also, my heart.

[15 : 31] My heart instructs me. In this Easter hymn David he not only confesses that he has a divine protection because he's being kept.

He also says that he has a divine provision because the Lord is his cup and his portion. And these verses in verses five and six, they're very interesting because the language that David is using here, it's the same language that was often used to describe those who were part of the tribe of Levi.

You'll remember that the children of Israel, they were divided into 12 tribes and they were 12 tribes according to the sons of Jacob. And after the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the 12 tribes of Israel, they finally crossed the river Jordan and they entered the Promised Land.

And it was on entering the Promised Land that each tribe inherited an allotted portion of the Promised Land. But for the tribe of Israel, the tribe of Levi, they never inherited an allotted portion of the Promised Land.

Instead the tribe of Levi, they were appointed as priests. They were to mediate between God and the people of Israel. And they were to mediate by dealing with all the sacrifices offered at the Tabernacle.

[16 : 55] And it's really interesting that in Numbers 18, we're told that the Lord said to the tribe of Levi, the Lord said to the tribe of Levi, you shall have no inheritance in the land.

Neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel. So the tribe of Levi, they didn't inherit an allotted portion of the Promised Land, all because the Lord was to be the portion of their inheritance.

And that's a language David is using here. He's speaking about his Saviour. David is speaking about the Lord and he's confessing that the Lord was the portion of his inheritance.

David was saying, the Lord is my divine provision. And the lines, those boundary lines he says, those boundary lines which set out the allotted portion of inheritance.

David says, these lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. He says, I have a beautiful inheritance in the Lord. The divine provision of the Lord is something for me, far more pleasant, far more beautiful, far more glorious than I could have ever imagined or wanted.

[18 : 11] Because David says, the Lord is my portion. The Lord is my inheritance. The Lord is to me beautiful and pleasant. He is my strength and my song.

He's literally, he's saying the Lord is all together lovely. He's a divine provision. And my friend, does that know what the gospel assures us?

That Jesus Christ is our divine provision. For God so loved this sin sick world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.

That's the divine provision that whosoever believes in him would receive a portion of the inheritance. Whosoever believes in him, the lines of God's divine provision would fall to them in pleasant places.

The gospel assures us, my friend, that when you trust in this risen Savior, you receive a divine provision. You receive an inheritance. An inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that faded not away but is reserved in heaven for us.

[19 : 30] And that inheritance, my friend, is Jesus himself. Jesus is your portion. Jesus is your inheritance. Jesus is the one who is beautiful and pleasant.

Jesus is the one who is all together lovely. And he's your only comfort in life and in death. He's your only comfort.

But you know, David, he not only took comfort that the Lord was his portion, he also took comfort that the Lord was his cup. And by cup, we see that in verse five, by mentioning cup, David's referring to the Lord's providence.

We often talk about the cup of providence. So the divine provision of the Lord was David's portion and his providence. And you know, David confesses, you are my cup and you hold my lot.

In other words, David says, the providence of the Lord was a divine provision. And he's saying, God's providence is my inheritance.

[20 : 41] God's providence is my inheritance. And you know, is that not the motto of the town of Stornoway? You see it written on the town hall.

You also see it written as you enter the Nicholson Institute. It's written there on the wall. God's providence is our inheritance. And you know, that's what David is confessing here, that his only comfort in life and in death is in a divine provision of providence.

God's divine provision of providence. You know, it was the late John J. Murray, the Reverend John J. Murray, who actually just passed away last week.

He passed away after contracting COVID-19. And John J. Murray, he served as a minister in Obann and St. Columbus Free Church in Edinburgh. And then laterally, he was an elder in Knightswood Free Church continuing.

But you know, he wrote this wonderful little booklet many years ago. It's a booklet called, Behind a Frowning Providence. And that title, it's actually a line taken from William Cowper's hymn.

[21 : 52] It's a hymn about providence. The hymn is called God, moves in a mysterious way. But you can read the PDF form of John J. Murray's booklet, Behind a Frowning Providence.

You can read it, you can find it online. And in the booklet, Reverend John J. Murray, he explains that providence, it's an old fashioned word that has a strange ring to modern ears.

Yet when we break it down into its parts, he says, the meaning becomes clear. It comes from the Latin meaning to see beforehand, providence to see beforehand.

Then he says, in our lives we plan beforehand. But we do not see what's going to happen. And you know, my friend, just thinking about that, you look at your calendar and maybe the things that you had planned beforehand.

You had maybe planned holidays, planned meetings, planned places you were going to go, people you were going to see. You planned it beforehand, but we didn't see what was going to happen in these few months that were lying before us.

[22 : 58] But you know, God, what providence is, says that God has planned everything for His creation. And because He's the sovereign God, everything will come to pass as He has purposed.

Everything will come to pass as He has purposed. And you know, when we speak about providence, I'm often reminded or reminded when I see the words of this hymn that are written on the wall in the mans.

We have a picture as soon as you walk into the mans and there's a picture there, it's got words of a hymn on it. And it's a hymn that was penned by Horatio Spafford. And he wrote the hymn after four of his daughters had been drowned at sea.

They were drowned in the Atlantic Ocean. And Horatio Spafford, like David, he acknowledged the divine provision of the Lord's providence. When he wrote those wonderful words, he said, And you know, my friend, the divine provision of the Lord's providence in your life today, it may be difficult.

You may be living in isolation. You may be concerned about infection. You might even be worried about illness. But you know, this Easter hymn is reminding you that your only comfort in life and in the face of death is a divine provision in Jesus Christ.

[24 : 33] And whatever is before us in the Lord's providence, we need to do what David did. Because David were told he read God's providence alongside God's word.

He read God's providence alongside God's word. Because we see that in verse 7, he says, When David considered the divine providence of the Lord, of the Lord, he did so in light of Scripture.

It was God's word which gave him counsel. It's God's word which gave him instruction. It's God's word which gave David perspective about God's providence.

And you know, that's how we must read God's providence in our lives today. We must read it in light of Scripture. We must see what God is saying to us in our providence today.

Because it's Scripture that affirms to us and assures us that in everything, absolutely everything, God is working all things together for good.

[25 : 37] To those who love God and are called according to his purpose. My friend, your only comfort in life and in death can be found in a divine protection and a divine provision through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But lastly, I want us to see that the words of this Easter hymn which need to be etched in our mind and written on our heart, they're words of a divine providence, a divine promise.

A divine protection, a divine provision and a divine promise. A divine promise. We'll look at verse 8. For David says, As we've said throughout Psalm 16, this is an Easter hymn because it presents to us one of the clearest and oldest prophecies about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's an Easter hymn. It's a hymn about the empty tomb. And I've emphasised that because in Acts chapter 2 in the New Testament, when the apostle Peter, when he stands up on the day of Pentecost, we see that Peter, he fearlessly and faithfully preaches about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In fact, Peter, he used the closing words of this Psalm, Psalm 16. He uses these words to call lost sinners to repentance.

[27 : 31] Because in this sermon, and you can read the sermon for yourself, Acts chapter 2, in this sermon, Peter explains that David both died and is buried.

But in the Easter hymn of Psalm 16, Peter says that David was prophesying there about the resurrection, that Jesus Christ would be raised up and exalted to the right hand of God the Father.

And so way back a thousand years before Jesus was even born, David was prophesying about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I know, don't you love the words of verses 10 and 11?

It's Jesus speaking. You will not abandon my soul to the grave. You will not allow your holy one to see corruption.

You make known to me the path of life. In your presence, there is fullness of joy at your right hand. Our pleasures forevermore. Don't you love those words?

[28 : 33] Those words were true of Jesus. But you know, they'll also be true of every single person who trusts in Jesus Christ by faith.

Because you know, my friend, the only comfort we have in life and in the face of death is what this Easter hymn assures us. There are risen Christ and an empty tomb means that sinners, like you and I, sinners can have an eternal life and a future resurrection.

And you know, that's our only comfort in the face of the coronavirus as well. Because you know, social distancing might not protect us. Self-isolation might not save us.

Doctors might not be able to cure us. And if COVID-19 doesn't get us, then the reality is, my friend, something else will. And you know, my unconverted friend, when you sat in church week by week, you were repeatedly reminded that life is uncertain.

Death is sure. Sin is the cause, but Christ is the cure. And I don't know if you've done anything about it since then.

[29 : 51] But surely, surely you'll do something about it now in the situation that you're being faced with. Because you know, your only comfort in life and in death is in this resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My friend, in this Easter hymn, Jesus is offering you. He's offering you a divine protection. He's offering you a divine provision. He's offering to you a divine promise.

And all he says to you in the Gospel is, come. This Jesus is offering you a divine protection, a divine provision, and a divine promise. So my friend, you come to Him.

You come to Him and you call out to Him. And He will show you mercy. Because you will have no comfort in life or peace in death until you do.

You know, at present, and with this I'll close, at present we're unable to have funeral services in the church. And they all have to be conducted at the cemetery.

[31 : 05] And for many people, they find a cemetery. They find it a cold and callous and cruel place to be. But you know, the grave of a Christian is a beautiful place to be.

In fact, I always find the grave of a Christian one of the most comforting places to stand. Because the grave of a Christian, I must see this more this evening, the grave of a Christian, it belongs to Jesus.

Isn't that what our Catechism teaches us? That because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the souls of believers who are at their death made perfect in holiness.

And they do immediately pass into glory. But their bodies, their bodies still being united to Christ, still belonging to Jesus, their bodies rest in the grave until the resurrection.

And you know my friend, the grave of a Christian is one of the closest places to heaven. And the assurance of this Easter hymn and what our Catechism affirms to us, is that on that glorious resurrection morning, when Jesus stands over all the graves and says, Talithahume, it's time to get up.

[32 : 21] Our Catechism reminds us that believers will be raised up in glory. They will be openly acknowledged and acquitted on the day of judgment. They will be made perfectly blessed and go into the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

My friend, that is our only comfort in life and in death. That's our only comfort, that the grave of a Christian belongs to Jesus.

And you know, it leaves the question, doesn't it? Does your grave belong to Jesus? Does your grave belong to Jesus? Because what is your only comfort in life and in death?

I hope that we'll all be able to say with the Heidelberg Catechism that I with body and soul am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Oh my friend, what is your only comfort in life and in death? Well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray.

[33 : 38] O Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to thee for thy word, thy word that gives to us the hope of the resurrection. We thank thee, O Lord, and we praise thee that we are able to have comfort in life and even peace in death.

And it is all through our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank thee, O Lord, that He is one who has defeated death and conquered the grave, that He has made that new and living way in which we are able to know the power of the resurrection.

And Lord, we pray that we would all know it, we would all experience it, because on that glorious final morning when Jesus calls his people home, O Lord, when the role is called up yonder, we will be able to lead that our community will be there, that we will all be in Emmanuel's land, praising Him for time and for eternity.

O hear us then we pray, bless us Lord, we ask, and keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus, because He is the author and He remains the finisher of our faith.

Plens us then we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.