

The Holy One of God

Psalm 16, Acts 13:29–37

For a number of weeks now we have been examining the apostle Paul’s sermon at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia in Asia Minor, in what is now the land of Turkey. Paul and Barnabas had been sent out as missionaries by the church in Antioch in Syria. They had preached on the island of Cypress where they had led the Roman governor Sergius Paulus to the Lord. They had sailed to the mainland and traveled many miles on foot. Now, on a Sabbath day, they had gone into a Jewish synagogue and Paul had been invited to address the assembly. Paul used the opportunity to speak of Christ.

His main burden is to demonstrate that Jesus, the Savior that God raised up, is the one whom the Hebrew prophets foretold. Though he had done no wrong, the people demanded that he be put to death. His body was taken down from the tree and buried in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead. Jesus’ glorious resurrection is the fulfillment of Scripture. Paul specifically cites three texts to show this. The past two weeks we considered the first two. The first, Psalm 2, shows that Jesus is the Son of God, begotten by the Father. The second, Isaiah 55, which we looked at last week, shows that Jesus is the Davidic king.

Today, we come to the third reference, Psalm 16, where David prophesies that Christ, the Holy One of God, would not see corruption. This is a remarkable prophecy. Nature itself teaches us that death is a fact of life in a fallen world. Death and decay are all around us. It is appointed unto men once to die. Every one of us ultimately has an appointment with death. Death is a separation of the soul from the body. At death, our bodies will be laid in a tomb and return to dust, but our immaterial part, our soul or spirit, will go either to heaven or hell, depending on what we have done with Christ. The book of Ecclesiastes expresses it this way: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). Man was made of the dust of the ground, and at death, his body returns to dust. The Bible calls this *corruption*. Our bodies, once alive, moving, brimming with life, will dry out and decay. Every member of the human race will experience this. That is why there is a longing in the human spirit for eternal life—for life beyond the grave. But the body of Christ would not see corruption. He would rise again the third day.

Let us consider the last two verses of Psalm 16. The speaker is David, but as he speaks he looks beyond himself to his descendant, Christ. He says, “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” As we consider this text let us see three things: Christ is *holy*, *incorruptible* and *the way to life*. First, Christ is

1. Holy

David says, “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow *Your Holy One* to see corruption.” David uses the remarkable phrase “Your Holy One.” This is a different word for *holy* than the one used earlier in the Psalm in the phrase “As for the saints who are on the earth, ‘They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight’” (v. 3). The phrase “As for the saints” could be translated “As for the holy ones.” The word here means *the set-apart ones*. This is the word used in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah has a vision of the Lord, high and lifted up, sitting on a throne, and the angelic beings cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts”: קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. God is set apart, he is distinct from all the creatures. And we, his people, are to be holy. He says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). As God is distinct from all the creatures, so we, his people, are to be distinct from the world. The people of the world are lost, dead in trespasses and sins. They are selfish. Their whole focus is on themselves and their own happiness. They have no time for God, no time for holy things, no time for the worship of him with whom we have to do, no time to get ready for judgment day. We, the people of God, are to be distinct from the people of this world. We must not adopt the world’s way of thinking, the world’s habits, the world’s preoccupations. We are to be holy to the Lord—set apart to him. Our presence as the people of God is a witness to our neighbors. We, like David, are to delight in the people of God. We should love to worship with God’s people, to spend time with God’s people. “As for the saints who are on the earth, ‘They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.’”

But here, at the end of the Psalm, David says, “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow *Your Holy One* to see corruption.” Instead of the word קְדוֹשׁ he uses the word חֶסֶד. In recent weeks I have spoken about the word חֶסֶד, meaning *mercy, kindness, covenantal faithfulness*. A person who is חֶסֶד is a person who practices חֶסֶד. God is merciful, kind, faithful to his covenant. We, his people, likewise are to be merciful, kind, faithful. By the Spirit’s power we are to bring forth the fruit of good character, showing by our attitude and actions that we belong to Christ. This word is the word David uses in the phrase “Your Holy One.” Christ is חֶסֶד. He, like the Father, is merciful, kind and faithful, showing steadfast love to his people.

But notice how he uses the word *Your Holy One* in this context. Christ is not just *the* Holy One, he is *Your* Holy One. This is a prayer. David has been speaking to “the LORD” (יהוה, v. 5). Now he speaks of his descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, and praying to the Father he calls him “Your Holy One.” Here is an intimation of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. He speaks, as it were, to the First Person of the Holy Trinity and says, “Your Holy One,” that is, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He doesn’t just say, “O LORD, you are holy.” Of course that is true, and it is said other places in the Bible. He speaks to Yahweh, whom we know

from the context is God the Father, and speaks of God the Son: “Your Holy One.” This Holy One is the Holy One *of God*, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

There have been various Jewish movements in history known as חסידים, the holy ones. These were Jews who were scrupulous in their observance of Jewish law, and even went beyond the legal requirements of ritual and ethical Jewish observance in their daily life.¹ But of course the Bible informs us that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). No matter how carefully or scrupulously we try to obey God, we can never measure up to his standard, which is absolute perfection. This is why we, like Paul’s hearers in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, need a Savior, and that Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot earn our own salvation, we can only depend on the finished work of Christ, God’s קדוש, his Holy One. Here is the one who through every moment of his life practiced רחמים, God’s mercy, kindness, covenantal faithfulness. Jesus Christ is truly the Holy One of God. Second, notice with me that Christ is

2. Incorruptible

Again, the inspired words are “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” The Father would not allow his Holy One to see corruption. These words teach us that Jesus’ body was incorruptible. When it lay in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea for three days and nights it didn’t begin to decay. In a fallen world this is utterly contrary to nature. Nature itself teaches us that bodies begin to decay at death. When Jesus stood in front of the tomb of his friend Lazarus and gave the command, “Take away the stone,” Martha, the sister of the deceased, protested: “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” How did Martha know that her brother’s corpse would be stinking after four days? She knew it from nature. Humans can learn a lot from nature. Paul says, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”² Nature teaches us things. It tells us about hair length. It teaches us about the movements of the stars and heavenly bodies. God is a God of order, and the material universe reflects that order. But there are limits to what nature can teach us. Nature cannot explain to us the origin of matter, or the origin of life. Nature has to be explained by the word of God. Only God was around at the beginning of creation, so only God can explain the origin of the created order and the origin of life. The study of astronomy, or chemistry, or biology, or physics, or anatomy, or medicine is worthwhile, and the Christian can benefit from scientific studies, but the opinions of scientists, like all human opinions, are fallible. All assertions must be tested by Scripture, God’s infallible

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasid>

² 1 Cor. 11:14

word. Opinions of scientists that are at variance with God's infallible word are wrong. Jesus said, "Thy word is truth." For the Christian, that settles the matter. By all means let us learn and benefit from true science, but when scientists speculate about origins, that is not science but opinion.

Martha knew that when the grave of her brother Lazarus was opened, there would be a terrible stench, owing to the decay of the corpse. Jesus demonstrated his deity by raising him from the dead. Lazarus was restored to life and lived for years afterward. But when Jesus himself was executed on a cruel Roman cross, and his body laid in a borrowed tomb, his body did not decay. Why! Because at his incarnation, when he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person," as our Confession teaches.³ This is nothing short of a miracle. Jesus had to be both fully God and fully man in order to accomplish our salvation. The Father loved us so much that he sent his divine Son to take on human flesh, yet he did not give up his deity. As man he died upon the cross, yet his deity gave infinite worth to his sacrifice of himself. Christ's death was sufficient to save every member of the human race, but it was intended to save only those whom the Spirit would bring to true faith. His death was sufficient for all, yet efficient only for the elect. At death Jesus' soul would go to Sheol, the abode of the dead. As Peter teaches, he was "put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:18–19). He went to the abode of the dead and heralded the good news of the accomplishment of his sacrificial death to the righteous dead who there awaited the final resurrection. He assured them that the work of redemption was finished. His sacrificial death which atoned for the sins of all the elect in every age was now an accomplished fact. They, too, will rise again at the last day.

But though the crucified Christ went to Sheol, the abode of the dead, his body, lying in a tomb outside Jerusalem, did not decay. As Calvin eloquently put it, "The life of Christ will be exempted from the dominion of the grave, inasmuch as his body, even when dead, will not be subject to corruption." As Paul would state, death would not have dominion over him. He would rise again the third day, according to the Scriptures. Again to quote Calvin, "we know that the grave of Christ was filled, and as it were embalmed with the life-giving perfume of his Spirit, that it might be to him the gate to immortal glory." Yes! The Third Person of the Holy Trinity was with the Second Person as his body lay in the tomb. Christ arose the third day, and because he arose, we who put our trust in him shall rise also at the last day. Listen again to Paul's words spoken in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia: "He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to

³ https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_08

corruption.” Then shortly afterward he quoted the sixteenth Psalm: “You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

If Jesus’ body was incorruptible, that means he is unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. That means he is utterly reliable. We can depend on him, no matter what. He never for one moment ceased being “very God of very God.” He “ever liveth” to make intercession for his saints. It is only through his perpetual intercession that we who have fled to him for salvation have hope in this life and in the life to come. And this brings us to our third point,

3. The way to life

Hear the last two verses of Psalm 16 once again, “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Because Christ’s soul was not left in Sheol, because the Father would not allow his Holy One to see corruption, David had the assurance that God would show him the path of life. He could look forward to fulness of joy in the presence of God. He could look forward to eternal pleasures at God’s right hand—the throne of the risen, ascended, glorified Christ.

These blessings David describes are not for him alone, but for all those who put their trust in Christ. If you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, if you are endeavoring to walk with him in this life, then these blessings are for you too! O fellow-believer, your Savior is the path of life—the way, the truth and the life. Salvation is to be found in him. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Throughout human history man has been searching for the fountain of youth. As we look at ourselves in the mirror we realize that we are getting older. Our skin starts to sag, our hair turns grey and begins to fall out. We might attend a family reunion and notice that everyone is looking older. Then it dawns on us that we look older too! People try diets or cosmetics or exercise that promise to take years off our appearance, and sometimes these help—for a time. But in the end we realize that aging is inevitable. One day we, too, will draw our last breath. But the Christian need not worry. Though death approaches, Christ is the life. He is our only comfort in life and in death. He is the way to life for those who believe in him. It is vain to trust in anything else. Only Christ has conquered death, only Christ can lead us to glory. Only Christ could say to his disciples, “where I go you know, and the way you know.” And even those who had followed him around personally for over three years still had questions. Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus’ reply was for Thomas—and it is for all who put their trust in Christ—“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Yes, Jesus is the only way to the Father.

This is a message that needs to be brought to every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. Christ is the way to life—eternal life forever, abundant life here on this earth. The pleasures of sin are but for a season. In the Father’s presence is fullness of joy—joy that cannot be contained, joy that cannot be improved upon. The world offers us entertainment, the world offers us concerts, the world offers us travel. These things have their place. God gives us richly all things to enjoy. The Christian praises him as the giver of every good and perfect gift in this life, and the one who blesses us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.

But there are millions who haven’t heard. The church is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, the place where God is worshipped and the good news of salvation is preached. But just as the church in Antioch in Syria sent out missionaries to take the gospel to the regions beyond, so the church in our own day sends out missionaries to take the gospel of the grace of God in Christ to places it has heretofore not penetrated. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, through its Committee on Foreign Missions, sends out laborers to the foreign fields. Yesterday we had the privilege of hearing how the gospel is going forth in Uruguay, a nation that over the last century had tried to expunge all vestiges of religion from its borders and establish a completely secular society. Even the names of streets and thoroughfares were changed, to make people forget about the religious roots of their society. Uruguay today is known as the most secular country in South America. People work seven days a week in the pursuit of economic security. The question was asked yesterday, “What about the influence of the Roman Catholic Church?” The answer: there isn’t any. The people of Uruguay are for the most part thoroughgoing secularists. There is almost no knowledge of the Scriptures. Crime is rampant. Cars, if they can be afforded at all, must be kept in garages at night; otherwise they will be vandalized. Psychological problems abound. Almost everybody has a personal therapist. There is much unhappiness and depression.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has spent a lot of money over the last ten years to send missionary-evangelists to Uruguay. Why? Because people there need Christ, and the only hope for the nation is the gospel. Furthermore, the church has received the Great Commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” These are the church’s marching orders, given to her by Christ, our King. “O Zion, haste, your mission high fulfilling, to tell to all the world that God is light; that he who made all nations is not willing one soul should perish, lost in shades of night. Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace; tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.” Christ is in this age building his church, his kingdom, his Zion. All who love the Lord Jesus Christ long to see the fulfillment of the Great Commission, looking for the day when the full number of the elect will be safely home in heaven in the presence of Christ. Our Lord is even now establishing his

church in the land of Uruguay. We heard the report of the first ruling elder ordained in the church in Montevideo—a brother named Juan, physically handicapped but with a heart for God’s people, a man who broadcasts the gospel in the Spanish language over the internet, a man who even today, in the absence of the only missionary church-planter in the city, is gathering with God’s people, watching over the flock. Just as Paul and Barnabas traveled many miles at great expense to take the gospel to Antioch of Pisidia, so the missionaries of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, possessing the same Great Commission, with your support and prayers, take the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is costly, and it requires constant learning of what is going on in the fields, and how we can pray more effectively, but God is glorified in the propagation of his gospel.

As human beings we naturally think most of ourselves. We tend to be selfish and self-centered. Our whole universe is focused on ourselves. We have to stretch a little to think beyond our own lives, our own survival, our own jobs, our own churches. We need to get out of our comfort zone. But we do that out of love for Christ and love for the lost who have never heard.

We want people to hear the good news that Christ will show them the path of life; that in his presence is fullness of joy; that at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. The pleasures of this world are temporary and fleeting. The pleasures at the right hand of Christ are permanent and lasting. Even today let us pray that our fellow believers in Montevideo, Uruguay would make contact with needy men, women and children and tell them of the love of Christ.

O brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is the Holy One of God! No one else could ever fill his shoes. He is the Savior not just for North America but for the world—the Savior perfectly suited to man’s deepest need.

Christ is holy, the one who perfectly embodies the mercy, kindness and covenantal faithfulness of the Father. He is incorruptible; his body did not undergo decay at death; it is a testimony that all who put their trust in him will one day be raised to eternal life; he is unchangeable, his promises are sure. Finally, he is the way to life, the only way to the Father, the only way to heaven. Let us put our trust in him. Amen.