

Psalm 16:9-11
Easter 2
April 3, 2016

Psalm 16:9-11 New International Version (NIV84)

(9)“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, (10) because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. (11) You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

When the Grave Grabs Our Attention, Pay Attention to the Word!

Have you ever noticed what makes people pay more attention to God’s Word? When difficulty comes or when there’s a theological question, people might be more willing to spend more time in God’s Word. Over the years as a pastor I’ve notice that people are most attentive to the Word when they face death or stand at the casket of a loved one. The grave has a way grabbing our attention that way. That’s the thought we want to consider on this Sunday after Easter. We’re going to take a look at the final verses of today’s psalm and, God-willing, learn that when the grave grabs our attention, that’s the time to pay attention to God’s Word.

I would imagine that if you drove past St. Paul cemetery and saw a pile of dirt next to an open grave, you wouldn’t think much about it. From our experience we know that when there’s an open grave someone has died and will be buried in it. However, if you saw a pile a dirt next to a grave that was open because some one had come back to life and came out of that grave, that would grab your attention. Did you know that that’s what happened to Jesus? An empty grave grabbed his attention. That’s the point of David’s words in Psalm 16. “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, (10) because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

Although the Holy Spirit used King David to write these words they are a prophecy about Jesus’ grave. Recall how the grave grabbed Jesus’ attention in the Garden of Gethsemane when he pleaded with his Father to take the cup of suffering away from him. But that couldn’t be. Sin had to be paid for and the only one who could do it was Jesus. But look at what Jesus says about his grave. He would not be shaken by it because his Father would not abandon him to the grave.

How could Jesus know that? Obviously, it’s because he is the all-knowing Son of God. But don’t think for a moment that he didn’t pay attention to what the Scriptures had to say about his dying and rising. He knew well what David wrote here. And this isn’t the only passage that prophesies his resurrection. There are many places in the Old Testament where the Holy Spirit promised that the Messiah would come out of his grave. Recall chapter 53 from Isaiah. We read it on Good Friday. After prophesying about how the servant of the Lord would suffer and die for sins and be assigned a grave with the wicked, Isaiah goes on, “Though he LORD makes his life a guilt offering he will see his offspring and prolong his days.” That’s God promise that the Savior would live after he died! And didn’t Jesus himself tell his enemies that when Jonah came out of the belly of the fish after three days that was a picture of his resurrection? Jesus paid attention to what the Scriptures had to say about his grave and rejoiced in what he read. And that’s why he kept telling his disciples to pay attention too!

The grave has a way of grabbing our attention when it’s our own or a loved one’s, and when it does that’s the time to pay attention to what the Scriptures say. And what do the Scriptures say? His empty grave proves that he is the Son of God; “He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead,” (Romans 1:4). His empty grave proves that his Word is true; “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again,” (John 2:19). His empty grave proves that we are forgiven; “He was delivered over into death because of our sins, and raised to life because of our justification,” (Romans 4:25). His empty grave proves that all those who believe in Jesus will rise from the dead too; “Because I

live, you too shall live," (John 14:9).

Now someone might object and say, "All this talk about the grave is morbid." If Jesus were still in his grave it would be, and we would avoid it at all costs. But Jesus is alive and death is no longer morbid because it has lost its power. So now we can be sure that even when the grave grabs onto us we too can say "My body also will rest secure, (10) because you will not abandon me to the grave."

II.

It's not only important to pay attention to what the Scriptures say about our graves being empty, it is also important to pay attention to what the Scriptures say about the fullness of joy we will have in heaven. "(11) You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Here, through David, the Savior is talking about the path of life for himself. We know what that path was. After he died for sin, he would rise from the dead and then ascend to the glory of heaven. All that was fulfilled according to the Scriptures. And in the Scriptures God has made known to us the path of life too! The only way to life in heaven is through faith in Jesus. That means that just as death and the grave were not the end for Jesus they will not be the end for believers. As Jesus entered the glory of heaven after he died, those who believe in him will enter that glory too. Listen carefully to this: Unless Jesus comes back before then, death will grab all of us. But when we die and while our bodies rest securely in grave to await the resurrection on the last day, we don't stop living. Our souls will enter the glory of heaven where God will fill us with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand.

I recall a time when I was teaching the lesson about heaven in an adult instruction class. We talked about how the Scriptures tell us that in heaven there will be no more sorrow, pain, and or death. That's all part of the joy to which we look forward. At that moment a woman in the class said, "Pastor, I know that part of the joy of heaven will be the absence of all the consequences of sin. But the real joy is that we are going to be with Jesus." She was right. God doesn't tell us all that we would like to know about heaven. But if we pay attention to what the Scriptures do say, the great joy of heaven is that we will be with Jesus. What a great comfort that is for as we think about our loved ones in Christ who have already died. They may no longer be with us here, but they are with Jesus there! What great hope that is as we think about our own death.

But there is more. In heaven we will also have eternal pleasures. Whenever I read these words I always think about some things we say and hear about loved ones who have gone before us, especially those who have died at a very young age. When someone dies, especially a young person, we often hear or say things like, "What a shame, they missed out on so much in this life." I understand what that means. But when you pay attention to these words of Scripture, they comfort us in knowing that whenever a Christian dies, especially someone who is young, they're not missing out on anything. In fact, from the moment they died they experiencing eternal pleasures in heaven for which we only hope. Whenever the grave grabs our attention, lets pay attention to what the Scriptures say.

Something that always grabs my attention is the bulletin board in our lobby. Each season it beautifully proclaims some truth from Scripture. Our member who is mostly responsible for those bulletin boards was concerned that the Easter display this year wasn't colorful enough. It is a drab gray of an empty tomb. But I reassured her that that is exactly what makes Easter beautiful—the grave is empty. That was true for our Savior and will be for us. Our grave will be empty. How can we be sure? Don't rely on what you can touch and see or how you feel. Pay attention to what the Scriptures say!