

Righteousness and Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening. Please do keep your Bible open. That's Sam, Sam 16. If you are a Christian, if you're a churchgoer in Scotland today, from week to week, month by month, year by year, you probably sing out loud with other people and sing a variety of songs far more than most people do in Scotland today.

Some people are in choirs and they might be quite serious about singing, but that's a niche hobby. Some people like karaoke. For a lot of people in Scotland, the only song that they'll sing with any regularity is O'Flyer of Scotland, if they happen to go to watch the Scotland football team play.

In the Euros a couple of weeks ago, I was listening to the radio in the car and I heard a letter being read out loud that was written by the widow of a Scotland fan from the Tartan army.

She'd written this letter to the team to be read to them before they went to play. He was buried in a Scotland strip and one of the things that she said about her late husband was that the only song she had ever heard him sing in all of the years that they'd been married, which was most of her life, was O'Flyer of Scotland.

That's true for a lot of people in Scotland, that we don't sing many songs. We don't sing often out loud with other people. And of the songs that a lot of us do sing, we don't think that much about the lyrics.

[1 : 4 2] I'm not a betting man, but I think if I were, I'd be confident that at Hamden Stadium they were to ask how many people of you who sing this song know who was proud Edward and when did he live. Probably most people wouldn't know.

Christianity gives you a very different life, a life full of songs, a life of singing out loud with other people. And hopefully if that's you, when we sing, we think more about the words that we sing together.

Because the content of what we sing is something that builds us up in the faith. Biblically we sing to God, but also biblically we sing to one another. And in our songs we build one another up in our faith.

And a lot of the songs that are there for us to sing, we've been singing tonight are the Psalms. And you're doing an evening series just now on Psalms over the summer, so tonight we're looking at Psalm 16.

And what I want to address tonight is how when we pay attention to the words that we sing when we're singing Psalms, there are some Psalms that are really easy to imagine yourself into the lyrics in.

[2 : 5 0] But there are other Psalms for that seems not as easy to do immediately. If you're a despondent, you can sing, why are you downcast, oh my soul, why so disturbed in me?

And you fit right into the Psalm. If you're in good times and you're singing Psalms of praise and rejoicing, you identify with the words, right? It could have been you who wrote them.

If you're deeply burdened by guilt and by sin, you're singing Psalm 51 or Psalm 32, you identify really directly with the words of the Psalm.

But there are some other Psalms that often Christians find hard to sing. Because some of the Psalms seem to be written from the perspective of a perfect person.

Someone whose life is a picture of total flourishing. Someone who can say, I love God perfectly with everything that I have. And I obey God perfectly in everything that I do.

[3 : 51] Someone who can say, the Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands, He rewarded me. And some Christians read that and think, how am I meant to sing that?

And the Bible also tells me that I'm a sinner and I'm not perfect. How am I meant to say I agree with Romans 7? All of the good things that I want to do, I somehow seem not to do.

And all of the bad things that I don't want to do, I end up doing. Who will deliver me from this body of death? I'm meant to say, I believe that and sing these songs about being a perfect person.

So tonight we're looking at one of those Psalms. We could call them perfection Psalms in Psalm 16. And the Psalm before it is one of those as well. Psalm 15 goes like this.

What kind of a person can be near to God? Who may ascend God's holy hill? And the description is an absolutely perfect person. And everything that person does and says even thinks in their heart.

[4 : 55] And the end of the Psalm says that the kind of person who can be near to God is utterly unshakable. So perfect as to be unshakable by whatever circumstances this world can throw at you.

And so Psalm 15 is like that and Psalm 16 carries on, but it takes it up another level. What kind of person does Psalm 16 have in view?

Someone whose entire life is perfect. Someone who is unshakable by circumstances. Someone who loves God perfectly.

So that's the first half of the Psalm versus one to eight. And then the second half is that this person's life is so perfect, so pleasing to God.

That person's sense of being loved by God is so intense that even in a world of death, death could never catch that person. Instead, this person so perfectly loved by God expects to transition into glory and to see God directly.

[6 : 05] It's, so if you're thinking of characters in the Bible, maybe if you're wondering what does this even look like in a narrative? The Old Testament example of someone like this is Enoch in the book of Genesis.

We have minimal details about him, but they're quite remarkable. You could sum up his whole life in the phrase from Genesis that Enoch walked with God. And then it says in Genesis that the way it describes how his life didn't end, but it transitioned, that Enoch was not found.

In other words, when he left this world, there was nobody. Instead, God took him. And Hebrews 11 in the New Testament explains what that means, that Enoch was so, he pleased God so much and God was so pleased with him that God did not want him to experience death.

So God took him. So he just bypassed it. Okay. A remarkable person in the Old Testament like that. And Sam 16, as we've been singing these words together, is written from that kind of person's perspective.

That perspective of being so pleased with God, so pleased by God and God being so pleased with you, that God will spare you from death and decay.

[7 : 21] That that's your expectation. That in a world where, in the words of Romans, the wages of sin is death, the wages that your life has earned would be life. Everlasting life, unbroken life.

Now, if you don't know how to read this kind of a Sam, or also if you're even remotely honest about yourself, you know, you might read Sam 16 and think, how am I meant to sing that?

How do I identify with that? Or if you know anything about the life of King David, and it begins with a Sam of David, you might think, how on earth could David sing that?

Was he just deluded? Is it just narcissism? Is he living in denial? How could someone who'd done all the things that he did produce these words? So what I want to do tonight is to help you think specifically about Sam 16 as a kind of perfection Sam about a perfect person.

And our prompt to do that is actually just from the Bible itself. So after Simon read Sam 16, he also read Acts 2. Now, Acts 2 is the sermon that Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost.

[8 : 35] Okay, it's from the Holy Spirit has poured out on people from all over the world. And Peter preaches the sermon on Jesus having suffered and died and being resurrected.

Did you ever notice what text he preaches from, from the Bible to preach this sermon? It's Sam 16. If you go further on through the book of Acts into Acts 13, there's a sermon by Saul and Barnabas and Antioch.

And it's a long detailed sermon all about why Jesus had to suffer and die and be resurrected. And their text as well is Sam 16.

And what you see in both of those sermons in the book of Acts is an insight that Sam 16 could not possibly be primarily about the person who wrote it. Couldn't possibly be primarily about David, a man whose life was a million miles away from perfect.

A man who died. It has to be about someone else primarily. And here's the big thing that someone else is also not you primarily.

[9 : 40] It's also not me primarily. So just like David wasn't ultimately singing about himself when he sang these words, neither are you and neither am I.

Peter's words, brothers, I may say to you with confidence about David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day. He foresaw that he spoke about the resurrection of the Christ.

Paul's words on Sam 16. David fell asleep and was laid with his father's and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

So this is a Sam that is primarily about Jesus. Because he was the embodiment of everything this song tells us about what it is like to be a perfect person.

A perfect life. This Sam 16 is like a window into the soul of Jesus, a window into his inner life. His experience of being everything that he is.

[10 : 38] Which of you are a Christian gives you powerful reasons to want to sing it. But if you're listening to this and maybe you're not a Christian, maybe you're thinking, well, that's nice for them, but this doesn't really matter for me.

Because I don't believe in Jesus. If that's you, here's the thing. That this song is also a direct challenge into your life for this reason.

Christians sing Sam 16 because we believe that our lives are anchored in a perfect unshakable person. Jesus himself is our constant.

And whatever our circumstances may be, he doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. He is eternally pre-existent. The fullness of all things. I mean, we can't find words that are high enough to sum up how great we think he is.

And he is the rock in our lives. We couldn't imagine anything greater than him. And in Sam 16, we have lyrics that put all of that into a song.

[11 : 44] And it's an anthem. It's thousands of years old. And it has been sung by people in different languages and different cultures and different nations and different times in history. And we have all sung Sam 16 because we believe in Jesus as the unshakable one, whose unshakableness bleeds into our lives and makes him a rock and our anchor wherever we come from.

And you can reject that anthem, of course, and reject everything it means. But the question that the song itself puts to you is, what kind of anthem can your life muster in its place?

It throws then the gauntlet to the songs at the center of your life. If someone spent a lifetime with you and only heard you sing one song ever, what would it be?

There's a thing that philosophers throughout the ages, if you go really far back in history, have called the summum bonum, the highest good.

And it's the thing that everybody has, it's the thing that you say, well, this is the ultimate ideal for me. This is what I live for, the thing that I value most above everything. That's my summum bonum and everybody has one, a thing that we value more than anything else.

[13 : 03] If you had to set your summum bonum, your highest goods, to words and music, what would it be? That's the kind of question that Sam 16 asks you.

Would it be? Oh, Flower of Scotland? So your summum bonum, your highest good, is something that you can't share with people who weren't born here?

Would it be, for a lot of people in Edinburgh, Taylor Swift's back catalogue? Shake it off. So your summum bonum is just your individual freedom from other people.

Would it be John Lennon's imagine? So your highest good admits that it is an absurd, impossible dream. But once you've chosen your life anthem, the kind of question that Sam 16 puts to you is, can that anthem make you unshakable?

However your circumstances might change. And what I mean by that is, what the Sam means is, if your circumstances change, will your highest good remain the same? Is it unshakable?

[14 : 10] Will it continue to give your life meaning and dignity and joy and purpose? Will it mean that you can live and die happily because of it, regardless of everything else in the world and in your life?

If Scotland never qualified for another tournament, which may happen, if the country goes to the doldrums, if Scotland one day no longer exists, which will definitely happen at some point, can a flower of Scotland make you unshakable?

Can it make your life now abundantly worth living, whatever the circumstances? If your highest good is your individual freedom from other people, and you can shake it off, and you suddenly lose your freedom through circumstances that you didn't choose, through illness or accidents or economic devastation or something like that, and all of a sudden you become radically dependent on other people, won't your song change too? Please don't shake me off.

If you're doing the five-year-olds version of that, please don't let me go. But before I've been singing, let it go. We could go on and on like this, with all these possible anthems.

But what I want to do is take this directly into the Psalm and help you think about it in two parts, because the Psalm is in two sections. The first part is verses 1 to 8, and the second part is verses 9 to 11.

[15 : 39] The first part is the picture of someone who loves God perfectly in life. And then the second part of the Psalm is God loving this person so perfectly that God wants to spare that person from death and decay.

So this is the portrait of the perfect life that Christianity offers you as an anchor for your own. This is Jesus being offered to you in song.

So the first part, verses 1 to 8. Now one thing to notice, and I'm glad that Simon read this because it wasn't on the screen, but the Psalm begins with a mixtam of David. That's not just something that the Bible translators added.

That's there in the Psalm, and you might be wondering what a mixtam is, this Hebrew word. And so am I, and so are we all actually, because it's a word that we just don't know how to translate. What was a mixtam? Nobody's sure, and that's why.

In the Bible translations, we just don't translate that word. Whatever the song is, it's a mixtam by David. And there are other psalms that are also called mixtams, or mixtamim, if you're a Hebrew purist.

[16 : 47] Mixtams of David, there's a series of them in the 50s of the Psalms. And with all of these other mixtam songs, it's like an SOS to God. It's a distress call.

And then these other Psalms, when it's a mixtam, David is being chased by his enemies, his life is in danger. And the lyrics in those other mixtam songs are a window into what he can see around him, into the near and present danger.

Psalm 16 is really interesting because it starts off by saying, this is a mixtam. But you would never know by reading the Psalm what exactly was going on in his circumstances.

That's just not part of the picture. You're only told that it's a mixtam. But we're not giving all the details of what is going on. What we do know is that the author is serene.

In circumstances that have made him send out this distress call. And what we do know is that whatever... So we don't know what was going on in his life, but in a way that's the point.

[17 : 57] Whatever the circumstances were that prompt him to say, I need a mixtam and I need one now. Those circumstances cannot match the highest goods that David has anchored his life in.

It's a bit like Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So David has the highest good in his life, a summum bonum, that so far outweighs whatever the distressing circumstances are in the background that he just doesn't tell us what they were.

And the way that he finds serenity there is by focusing on God as his highest good. Look at it in verse 2. I have no good apart from you.

Literally in Hebrew what he writes is, apart from you, nothing I have would be good. It's like a much better version of some of your old enough to remember Alicia Keys.

[18 : 55] Some of you are... That won't mean anything to some of you, but she's a singer. She has a song called, If I Ain't Got You. And it's about someone who makes another human being their highest goods.

If people want it all, I just want nothing at all, because everything means nothing if I ain't got you. Okay? That's almost a paraphrase, but not about another human being about God.

Everything means nothing. Nothing is good if I haven't got you. So he starts off by focusing his own life on God as his highest goods. But then after that, what you see is instead of thinking about whoever is on his tail at the moment, putting his life in danger, he looks at it and he sees the human race.

And he sees that there are only two ways for humans to live. And this is the contrast in verses 3 and 4. There are two groups of people. There are what he calls the saints in the land.

And he doesn't say much about what they're like directly. And instead we find out what they're not like, because he says more about the other way to live, which is those who run after another God.

[20 : 01] And he writes that the sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply. Now what makes that line an exceptional lyric in a song is just how much detail, how much meaning he folds into a few verses, a few lines.

So we have this in English, who run after. Okay? And the kind of picture that David wants you to see is not Usain Bolt running skillfully, with pleasure coursing through his every sinew, as he runs excellently.

It's more like running after in the sense of being harried. And not just hurried, but harried with an A. That something is kind of whipping you, that it's short term, that you don't have time to catch your breath, you're harassed.

This is not a park run. To be harried by something is when you're put under strain, by that thing, because of the demands that it puts on you, and you have to react right now, drop what you're doing and run.

So it's a word that actually gets used quite a lot in narratives in the Old Testament. And it's always when circumstances have changed right here, right now, and I have to react, and I've got to run, and I don't have time to think.

[21 : 21] So it's used, you always see it used in narratives to describe people who are pushed along anxiously in short term ways. And it's a word choice.

It's actually the opposite of someone like Enoch. He wasn't harried, he walked with God. They're very different ways to move through life.

But in lots of Old Testament stories, people are hurriedly running after things, because circumstances are changing around them. And even it gets used in 1 Samuel, but David himself, when the Philistines are chasing after him, he's harried by them.

But here in Psalm 16, whatever was happening in the background, David wasn't the one here who felt harried.

He feels more like Enoch walking with God. In fact, the people who are harried are the ones who are running after him. And in that way, it kind of doesn't make sense. It's like a weird inversion of the normal narratives you read about David, who's being chased and he's harried and so on.

[22 : 24] But actually, when it looks externally like they're not harried, the ones who are chasing him, actually they are. And he's walking with God.

So the people who are harried are those who run after the demands of another God. And the picture of the life that David gives us that comes from this, is that if you live by that, harried by circumstances, where the highest good that you live for is not the actual ultimate good, which is God, your sorrows will increase.

They won't reduce, they will multiply. And so the picture that David gives us of what a life like that looks like, there are two details here, and they're probably things that culturally will seem very foreign to you, that those gods demand blood sacrifices and they demand your loyalty in the way that a crime boss will tell you, say my name.

Once you've said the name, then that's it. You're bowed into submission and they own you. So they demand blood sacrifices and they demand your loyalty, these other gods. Now those might sound like very strange foreign things to you, especially if you're not familiar with the Bible.

Let me show you how this is really not that different to life in Edinburgh in 2024. Now, some of you will be young enough, not young enough to know Alicia Keys, but young enough to have seen Inside Out 2.

[23 : 47] It's the big blockbuster globally, the cinema at the moment. And I'll try to draw an illustration without giving away any spoilers for those of you who haven't seen it yet. But it's about a girl who's just become a teenager and she goes off for the summer to a hockey camp, and it's about her inner life and her emotions and all the kind of challenges of working out who you are as a teen.

And in Inside Out 2, because it's looking at her inner life, I can say this without giving away any spoilers, she is an idolater. She sets up idols in her own heart.

Things where she thinks, if I don't have that, I am nothing. So she sets up these things that she thinks she needs to have as a new teenager. And the film is about the ways that the idols that she sets up, set demands on her.

Tell her, if you want me, and by the way, you need me, and without me you're nothing, these are the things you're going to have to do. This is the kind of person you'll have to become. Say my name.

And the film is about this girl and the way that idols grow in her heart. And what those demands will cost her if she's going to meet them.

[24 : 54] If they had a tagline in the poster for the film, it could have been the sorrows of those who run after another God will multiply. And why that film is so powerful is that it's really telling us a true story about idolatry, that serving idols is exhausting, trying to take ordinary things, good things, but burden them with being the ultimate thing, is absolutely exhausting.

And it can't give you lasting joy and peace. In fact, David's insight is that your sorrows will only multiply. That's the kind of life you'll have. If you were in David's world, thousands of years ago in the ancient Near East, you would call those things God's divine beings, the God of fertility or crops or of war or whatever, and that God gives you demands, conduct these sacrifices to me, bow down before me, say my name.

In Edinburgh, we don't call our idols gods, most of us, but it doesn't really make any difference. It's the same thing that's going on inside of us.

Your chosen identity, your career, your achievements, your image, your political ideals, sports, pleasure, culture, how successful your children are, what postcode you have.

And all of these idols are exhausting and demanding. And if you try to make any one of those finite things, take the place of what only the infinite, where only God himself can fulfill, you actually, you can't take one finite thing, substitute it for an infinite God, and not mess up all of the other finite things in your life.

[26 : 51] If you take any one of those details and try to make it the ultimate thing, everything, your sorrows and all of those things will only multiply. Let me give you a real example of this.

So, I'm sure probably a lot of you will have noticed that Taylor Swift did some concerts in Edinburgh recently, and after her concert here, I read an article in The Guardian by a mother who had flown from America with her quite young daughter to see the concert.

She said that doing this made her feel at the same time like the best and the worst mother in the world. And her reasoning for this was, my child has to be happy.

And from my daughter's perspective, if there was a chance to see Taylor Swift, and I didn't buy that ticket, what kind of mother would I be, the letdown for my child?

How could she be happy if I didn't do this? And I got her the ticket at all costs, and I flew to Scotland, and seeing the joy in her face, I felt like the best mother in the world, but at exactly the same time, I felt like the very worst mother in the world.

[28 : 01] Because do you know how much this all cost, and how many needy causes there are in the world that I believe in, how many mouths that could have been fed, how many people that could have been brought out of misery in real terms, and I spent all of this money taking my eight-year-old to a concert in Scotland, and think about the carbon footprint of this journey, for what?

And I felt like the worst mother in the world, and the article was all about how I can't resolve this. The sorrows of those who run after another God, not the true God with a capital G, will multiply.

You take finite things and elevate them to the infinite, and you collapse the whole thing. And you'll only ever end up feeling like the best and the worst worshiper of your God with a lowercase g that you could possibly be.

So that's one level. That's a very trivial example. But think about all the other gods with a small g that you have tried to run after in your life.

And ask yourself, has all of that running after them ever made you less anxious? Has it ever helped you to become unshakable? Has it ever given you that lasting joy and meaning and pleasure?

[29 : 22] In Psalm 16, actually, Jesus is the only person who knew what it was like to say everything that you read in verses 5 to 8, and say it and feel it all truthfully.

And Jesus was the only person in history who had every right to feel like this, to say, because my Father is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Jesus himself, in this world of all of us who feel like the best and the worst worshippers of idols, Jesus is the only perfect worshiper of God, the only person who loved his Father perfectly, who loved his neighbor perfectly.

And because of that, he is the ultimate non-anxious presence in the human race, in human history in our world.

And if you know that about yourself, speaking of Jesus, if you're a perfect person like that, that feeling even extends into how you think about death.

[30 : 29] This is where we think about verses 9 to 11. So this is where the Psalm shifts from how much the perfect person loves God to how much God loves this perfect person.

God loves this perfect person so much that God never wants the relationship to end. God does not want death to stop it.

Imagine, if you can, even just begin to try to, imagine knowing that your entire relationship to God is so secure that you could say it and truly mean it, my whole being rejoices.

And by that, you're talking about your body. This finite, breakable thing feels secure. And your inner life, my heart is glad because you believe and you know and you feel so much that God loves you to an unimaginable degree, so much so that he won't abandon your soul to the grave.

Remember when, in the Bible, at the beginning, when Adam sinned and leaves Eden and leaves paradise, and he hears these words, you came from dust and to dust you shall return.

[31 : 56] Imagine feeling like the only human being for whom that rule does not apply. To glory, I shall go, I will see your face where there are pleasures forevermore.

To feel like that is, to know that that is your destiny. What I'm asking you to imagine at this point is what Jesus knew, what Jesus felt in his own body and soul.

I'm asking you to use Sam 16 to imagine why Jesus is able to say out loud that nobody can take my life from me.

My life can only end if I lay it down because my Father loves me so much. I've spent a lot of this sermon saying that Sam 16 is not primarily about David's or about you or about me.

It is primarily about Jesus, but that doesn't mean that it's not about us at all. It is secondarily about Jesus and it is secondarily about you and me if we are Christians.

[33 : 08] I want to close just by saying two things really briefly about this, about how the secondarily is a Sam for us and about us. There are two points about the gospel really, which are righteousness and resurrection.

One, righteousness. The gospel is that in Jesus, God offers you perfect righteousness, that Jesus himself is the perfect person, that he is everything that we have failed to be.

And he has the super abundance of righteousness and he is so generous with it and he offers it to you. And he will credit your account for you only had deficit before with all of the righteousness of his perfect obedience.

Everything that he could say truly about himself in Sam 16, that can be transferred to you, that can become yours in the gospel. And what that means then is that if you are in Christ, when God looks at you, it's like he looks at you through a lens that is 100% made of Jesus.

And he sees you through that lens. And what he sees in your life is everything that Jesus has earned. The Heidelberg Catechism has a way of putting this. I think it's really beautiful when it explains how we as descendants of Adam have inherited his fallen nature.

[34 : 33] We have sinful natures and because we have those natures, we then go on to live out those natures in our lives and we commit sins. But the Heidelberg Catechism says that because Jesus is our mediator with God, if you are in him, if you are in Christ, when God looks at you, it is as though you had never sinned or been a sinner.

So everything about this perfect person in Sam 16 is transferable to you. And that is one of the mind-blowing things about the gospel. Sam 16 offers you a perfect person in your place.

It offers you righteousness. And the second thing is resurrection. God the Father is perfectly pleased with God the Son.

Because everything that you read about in Sam 16 is what it was really like for Jesus, that he loved God perfectly. And God the Father has been perfectly pleased with God the Son actually for all eternity before there was time and space.

He was perfectly pleased with his Son. And that's no less true when the eternal Son enters time and space in the incarnation, when the word becomes flesh, and God then walks among us.

[35 : 50] And heaven opens and the voice from above says, this is my beloved Son. In him, I am well pleased. That wasn't something new from God the Father.

He had been pleased with his Son forever before there was time and space. And that continues in time and space with the incarnate Son Jesus Christ.

And the Father never wants that relationship with his Son to end. And here's something that's astonishing about the gospel.

That it is just as true of you, that God loves you too much to want his relationship with you to come to an end.

And that is why in the gospel, the resurrection of Jesus is the Bible calls it the first fruits of our resurrection.

[36 : 51] And it's why death is not the end. And that's why when we're singing this Psalm, this anthem, about how unshakable Jesus is in himself as this perfect person, that actually changes us.

And it has the power to make us unshakable, to make us less anxious whatever our circumstances. And if you believe that, then what a resource you have in life and in death in becoming less shakable, more secure, more loved, more able to love, less fearful, less anxious to no longer be harried because you walk with God.

But if you reject it, then the question, the Sam's own question for you is what other anthem? What song will you sing in its place?

Let's pray. Our Lord, our God, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ, the perfect person for the Son whom you've loved from all eternity and whom you have always been well pleased.

And we thank you that He came into our world, that you were pleased with Him there. We thank you that He's the true and greater Enoch, that He, it's not simply that He was not found and was taken by you, but you were perfectly pleased with Him and He bore the punishment nonetheless that we deserved.

[38 : 48] We thank you that He entered death. We thank you because of His perfection, because of the unimaginable power of your love for Him, that it was not possible as we read in Acts 2, for death to hold Him.

We thank you for His resurrection, for how that changes everything, for how it has the power to make us unshakable as well. So sanctify us through your words.

We pray, make us more like Jesus. We pray for His unshakableness to change our lives, to help us to grow as people who walk with you, who are no longer harried by all of the circumstances of life.

So help us to flourish, help us in our own small way to know what it is like when we sing words like these in Psalm 16. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.