

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 15

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 15

Overview

Traditionally Psalm 15 was thought to have been composed for the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. (*See 2 Samuel 6:12-19*) Whether or not that is the precise historical setting, the psalm itself does present us with an examination process for those who would come to the house of the Lord. In the Old Testament, there were restrictions about who could enter what part of the temple and what spiritual conditions were required for entrance. For example, there was a court of the gentiles and a court of women that allowed their access but they were restricted from the rest of the temple area. Additionally, people who had bodily sores or other ailments were to be kept out of the temple area. The whole psalm is set up to ask what it takes to be in the presence of the Lord. We see a similar examination in *Isaiah 33:14-17*.

When Christ dies on the cross and the temple curtain is torn in two, this whole system is fulfilled and abolished in Him. Not only do we have eternal access to God through Christ, but all of the restrictions and divisions are taken away in Him. There is no more court of the Gentiles or court of the women, because all are on in Christ. (*See Galatians 3:26-28*)

This is the shortest of the psalms we have covered this far and the outline reflects that brevity.

Outline

The Psalm is setup as an answer to the question in verse 1 with a concluding word of assurance.

1. The question – 15:1
2. The answer – 15:2-5b
3. Concluding word of assurance – 15:5c

The question – 15:1

- :1 - Perhaps the most interesting part of this question posed in verse 1 is not all that easy to see in English. There are actually two questions in verse 1 and they seem similar, but the difference is found in the Hebrew verb in each sentence.
- In the first sentence, *O Lord, who may abide in Your tent*, the Hebrew verb translated as “abide” is *gur* and it means “dwell as an alien or sojourn”. The idea here is that it is not a permanent place of residence but a passing through. We see this verb used of Abraham in **Genesis 21:34**, where Abraham temporarily resided in the land of the Philistines.
 - In the second sentence, *Who may dwell on Your holy hill*, the Hebrew verb translated as “dwell” is *shachan*, and it refers to a permanent dwelling. It is actually the word used for the presence of the glory of God at Mt Sinai in **Exodus 24:16**.
 - So the questions act as a progressive: who may come into your presence temporarily and then be allowed to stay there permanently.
How is it that we can now permanently be in the presence of God?
Read John 14:1-3, 23

The Answer – 15:2-5b

- :2 - This verse almost acts like a more generalized look at what a righteous life looks like and the other verses that follow give more specific guidelines. There are three general principles given in this verse:
1. Walk with integrity – **See Genesis 6:9; 17:1**
 2. Work righteousness – This seems to suggest the deliberate acts that are done to be in step with God.
 3. Speaks truth in the heart – Recall what James had said about the tongue – **James 3:1-12**
- :3 - The interesting thing about this verse is that it includes both unintentionally saying something that hurts someone and intentionally doing so.
- The phrase translated “slander with his tongue” could better be understood as “stumble with his tongue”. Thus the idea that we can unintentionally hurt someone with what we say.
What can you do when someone is hurt or offended by what you have said, even if it wasn't what you intended?
 - “Does evil” – This phrase would include the deliberately saying of something to hurt someone. There is malice behind the words.

- “Nor takes up a reproach against his friend” – As I read this, I take it to mean that there are times when we should overlook small wounds. We don’t need to be hurt or offended by everything.
- :4 - There is a contrast between the words “despised” and “honor” in this verse. Those who are Godly are to despise behavior that is not Godly but we should also honor those who fear and serve the Lord.
- “He swears to his own hurt and does not change” – The one who desires to come into the presence of the Lord must be one who maintains the integrity of the word he/she gives. **Read Proverbs 6:1-5**
What is the Proverbs advice for someone who has been caught in the words that they have spoken?
- :5 - The directives even include the way one handles their money. In the Old Testament, Israelites were not to charge other Israelites interest on loans. **Read Deuteronomy 23:20**
Why is the subject of money so difficult for us to talk about in the church? Why do we treat money as a spiritual discipline differently than prayer?

Concluding Word of Assurance – 15:5c

- :5 - We mustn’t confuse this assurance with being in God’s good graces because we are then worthy. Rather conducting our lives this way gives us a calmness to know that we needn’t fear what others may say about us because we walk with integrity, we work righteously, and we speak truthfully.

Summary

Psalm 15 is a call to examine our lives. Since we by the grace of Christ dwell in the presence of God, our lives should reflect a godly life. The exhortations to god-pleasing behavior in this psalm isn’t meant to make us worthy of heaven, but to live a life that reflects the grace already received.

Closing Prayer