



Psalm 15

What Does It Take To Live With God?

For the next several weeks we're going to be looking at some of the Psalms. There are 150 of them, including the longest (Ps 119) and the shortest (Ps 117) chapters in the Bible – so, no, we're not going to do all of them. But I do want to examine a few of them before we start the book of Ephesians.

The Psalms have been referred to as the Bible's Hymnbook, it's songbook. And they have always been viewed in a special way, even when compared to the rest of the Bible. Perhaps you have seen small pocket-sized Bibles that contain only the New Testament along with the Psalms and Proverbs. I'm not sure how I feel about that because it's hard to fully understand the meaning of the New Testament without the background of the Old, but it does show us that people have always felt the Psalms were extraordinarily useful and helpful to Christians.

Why is that? It's probably because the Psalms are poetry, they're lyrics, and that's one of the first things we turn toward to help us express what we feel. Many of you have playlists or stations that you listen to when you want to get pumped up, or when you want to chill out because music is useful in those ways, it can make us feel more of what we're feeling or help us feel something different. And when you read through the Psalms, you recognize that we humans feel a lot. Joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust? They're all there. Along with depression, confusion, and frustration and many others.

Psalm 23 is one of the best-known chapters of the Bible. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..." is there any way to know how much comfort those lines have brought to people around the world throughout time?

Psalm 51 provides a model for confessing our sins.

Psalm 77 guides us in what to do when God is silent.

Psalm 78 reminds us of big events in history in the same way the Marines' Hymn reminds us of the Halls of Montezuma and the Shores of Tripoli – ensuring we understand that we're born into something larger than ourselves – that others have gone before.

Psalm 15, which we're going to look at this morning, asks the poignant question: what does it take to get close to God? Who can live in His presence? What kind of people have access to God? And the psalm gives us an answer about what it takes to live in proximity to God today, here on earth, not when you're dead, but now.

So let's dig into it and see what it has to say.

Look here in your Bibles with me at Psalm 15, and the first thing we notice is that it's

A Psalm of David.

David is the famous shepherd boy who killed the giant Goliath and went on to become king of Israel. He's the one who sinned with Bathsheba and was the father of Solomon. In addition to being a warrior, he was a worshipper, a man familiar with the weight of his sin, who experienced the joy of seeing God do incredible things in his life, and someone who went through dry and difficult seasons where he wondered if God was even there.

But this morning we find him asking:

**Ps 15:1 LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?**

Now, this is an important question to David personally because he has just moved the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant – to Jerusalem and set them up by his royal palace. He and God are going to be neighbors.

And so, he's not just asking a rhetorical question, he's thinking through things personally – every day he'll be able to look out his window and be reminded of the fact and the presence of God which is what the Ark symbolized – it was a physical, tangible, reminder of the presence of God among His people – and now, it's right over there, in clear line of sight from David's window. And the fact that the Ark is here suddenly means this is God's holy hill. David, the king, just got bumped down a notch. He evicted himself in a sense and gave priority to God.

And here's a little Nerd Note for you Bible meat-eaters out there: When David asks **who may 'dwell' in Your holy hill** the word is *shakan*, from which we get *shekinah*, the term used to describe God's glory dwelling in tabernacle. So, David's asking the question: if Your shekinah is here, who can shakan with You?

So back to the question at hand, what do you think? Who can abide with God? Who can live in His presence?

Some say the answer is everyone. The average person on the street today assumes Heaven is an inheritance we're all going to get. But if that's true, why this question?

Why is David, the king of the nation, the highest authority in the land, looking for clarification and guidance and permission even to keep living in his own house next door to God's tabernacle, can he dwell on God's holy hill? Doesn't David know that everyone is welcome to come hang out at God's house? I mean hey, the fridge is stocked and the game's on, right? Oh, and there's no password on the Wi-Fi – just come, hang out with God – no big deal Dave! Right?

No. Wrong. The question draws our attention to what we already realize if we've ever thought about the issue. We know in the depths of our soul that some people can come in, and others will not be welcome. But, who is who? And, what list am I on? Do I have an invite or not?

In order to answer this question, some people say only 'good people' will be able to live with God. They'll quickly confess that they haven't been perfect, but many still expect to be let in because even if you don't have it all together, you can make up for it – if your good outweighs your bad. And we're all able to look back on our own highlight reels and find some great things we did – some money we gave to charity, or some act of kindness we showed, or that time we did something we didn't really want to do, but we did it anyway because it was going to help someone. We've all got a few stories we can tell of how great we are, even if we're far too humble to make a big fuss about it or post it all over social media. #Humblebrag.

But here's the deal, when you read through the Scriptures something you find missing is metrics. When we get to the answer to David's question about who can dwell in God's holy hill, you won't read any numbers - nowhere in this Psalm or the rest of the Bible do you find anything saying you need to put in X amount of hours, or years of ministry service or helping others. When it comes to evaluating your spiritual health, the Bible is silent on the kind of specifics we're so accustomed to briefing in our work projects.

There are no itemized checklists: did you give money to the church? Did you say your prayers each night? Did you do read the entire Bible?

God's not looking for you to cross a certain threshold. The cross is His threshold. You either come in by that, or you don't come in at all.

One last thing, one last answer to the question who can dwell with God, and that is - some people say you can get into God's house if you're presentable – if can pass the test, the examination, the judgment. There's a certain dress code for God's house and you have to make sure you look the part and pay the price. Did you put something in the offering? And, are you all dressed up when you come to church? Are you wearing your Sunday best? Did you take a proper shower last night or this morning, and put on your special cologne or perfume, are you wearing something that needed to be ironed? Did you do this church thing right?

Many years ago, when Madeleine and I were newly married and she was working her way through nursing school, she served as a waitress at Tony Roma's, a restaurant chain in California. And we attended a local church, Calvary Chapel Murrieta. Well, you meet all kinds of people on the staff in a restaurant – the servers, the cooks, the busboys, and the bartenders all have different backgrounds.

Madeleine made friends with them all and got to have some great conversations with one woman in particular who had a rather colorful past and was now working as the bartender. Well, Madeleine eventually invited her to come to church with us one night for a Sunday

evening service and she agreed. So, Madeleine and I swing by to pick her up from her house, and she comes out wearing this perfectly modest, full length, floral print dress that looked like something out of Little House on the Prairie.

I mean, it looked like nothing else we'd ever seen her wear. And we were both dressed pretty casual. In fact, I think she was embarrassed by how formal she was dressed compared to everyone else there that night – she couldn't believe that people could dress 'normal' and come to church. She thought that you had to get yourself all cleaned up because church is where all the pretty people go. At least those that look the part.

Now, if you're someone who likes to get dressed up for church on Sunday, that's fine – as long as your heart is in the right place. We can get too dressed up and strut around like a peacock hoping everyone notices what we're wearing and looking down on those who didn't take the time to give it a little effort. But we can just as easily make too much out of ourselves by NOT putting any extra effort on Sunday and just rolling in like it's any other day. It's all about the heart, friends. You don't have to wear anything special, or do anything special to dwell in God's house; you just need to come here more aware of Him than of yourself.

In fact, Jesus told the story (Luke 18:9-14) of a very religious man, a Pharisee, someone who dressed the part and acted the part of a very devout, very spiritual person. The Pharisee went into the Temple to pray one day and all he did was talk to God about what a great guy he was because of how seriously he took his religion. And then while he was praying, another guy came in – a tax-collector, someone who worked for the Roman government and would have been viewed as the scum of the earth by the Pharisee, and this tax-collector simply hung his head, beat his chest and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And Jesus said it was the tax-collector whose prayers God really heard.

You see, you don't have to show up with your act all together and putting on airs. You can be real and raw with God, He sees and knows everything that's going on anyway. Confess your sins, be honest and open, and ask Him for help because as we're about to see, the answer to who can hang out in God's house all gets down to this: the heart of the man or woman involved. What's their character like, and how is that manifested in their actions and their deeds?

Read the rest of the Psalm with me:

Ps 15:1 LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

2 He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;
3 He *who* does not backbite with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;

4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
But he honors those who fear the LORD;
He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;
5 He *who* does not put out his money at usury,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these *things* shall never be moved.

We find eleven standards laid out here if you're looking for a count. Some are positive – he does these things; some are negative, he doesn't do these things. But the point is not to create a template; it's to provide a well-rounded description. So, if you turn to Psalm 24 you find the question asked again, with a slightly different answer that should sound familiar to those of you who worship with us regularly because it's where we get the lyrics to a worship song:

Ps 24:3 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.
5 He shall receive blessing from the LORD,
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
6 This *is* Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him,
Who seek Your face.

And later, the prophet Isaiah brings up the question, with another, slightly different answer which includes:

Is 33:15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,
He who despises the gain of oppressions,
Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,
Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed,
And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:
16 He will dwell on high;
His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks;
Bread will be given him,
His water *will be* sure.

None of these answers are the exact same, but none of them contradict each other either because they're all getting after the same point – the person who can live in God's presence is the person who desires to be there and that desire is made obvious by the evidence of their life.

That's the message of Ps 15 as summarized in verse 2:

Ps 15:1 LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?

Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

2 He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;

We could summarize that as the person who walks in integrity, as demonstrated in his actions and heard from his lips. So, the righteous will have works of righteousness to point to.

They won't be found doing evil to [their] neighbor. They'll despise people who are vile and honor those who fear the Lord. They'll be generous with their money and on guard against greed.

And when the righteous person, when the Christian who is made righteous in Christ, gives you their word, you can count on it, you can depend on it. They will swear to their own hurt and not change.

Scripture promotes an ethic of truth and righteousness not whatever promotes personal happiness or fulfillment.

This is an idea that is so lacking today in the world around us. Do you believe that anyone wants to give you their word, make a promise to you, and then keep it, even if it's hard? No. Of course not. We live in a society filled with legal loopholes and people who want what's easy.

The clearest example of this is found in marriage – that we now have no-fault divorces. In order to get into a marriage you stand and promise someone that you will be there for them no matter what – through thick and thin, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, but a few years later things get hard. It's inconvenient, you don't feel fulfilled, it's not as exciting, the other person's issues become more apparent, and now the things that you swore get pushed aside for a couple thousand bucks in legal fees.

Friends, there will be times when keeping your word is hard. But God wants us to let our yes be yes, and our no, no. When we say something, He wants us to stand by it. Jesus suffered the hurt of the cross – He set His face toward to Jerusalem and did not change His course because He knew what His faithfulness would mean for us. Think and pray hard about the commitments you make, and then ask God to give you the strength to fulfill them.

Which brings us to the issue of the tongue – here in Psalm 15 one of the things we learn is the righteous man or woman avoids the sins of speech. They know when to open their mouth and speak truth from the heart, and when to keep their mouth shut so as not to gossip or speak unkindly about others. They don't start it by backbiting with their tongue, and they don't keep it going by taking up a reproach they heard from someone else. They despise things that are vile and honor things that please the LORD.

I've got to say something here about what we allow into our hearts and minds through the conversations we listen to, the radio or podcast we tune in for, the movie or videos we watch, the books, articles, or magazines we read – these things all come into our hearts and affect the way we think and the things we say. What comes out of us is a reflection of what is put into us. And we have an abundance problem with information today just like we have an abundance problem when it comes to food.

Most Americans today are overweight by just about any standard you want to use. We eat too much that's not very good for us because it's all available to us.

But what about the information we consume? How is your information diet? What kind and quality of things are you allowing into your heart and mind? And those of your family? And what affect is that having on the way you see the world and the people in it?

You understand that there is junk food, stuff that spikes your blood sugar and clogs your arteries, but it makes you feel good for a minute while you eat it, and you always want more of it. Well, think about it – is there junk information? Things that have no intellectual nutritional value, things you might enjoy hearing or seeing for a moment but which don't sustain you and actually ruin your appetite for things that are good?

The way we view the world and the people in it is affected by what we take in through our eyes and ears. The reason the righteous man honors those who fear the LORD and despise the vile, the reason he able to control his tongue is because his heart and soul are being filled with truth and beauty, justice and righteousness and then, when he opens his mouth, goodness and truth come spilling out. What comes out of us is a reflection of what is inside us and what is inside us is affected by what we take in.

The Bible tells us in the book of James that the tongue is this tiny little thing comparatively and yet it has a tremendous impact like the bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder of a massive ship, this little thing affects the direction of something much larger. He says an entire forest can be set on fire by the smallest spark flicked out by the tongue and marvels at the fact that men have tamed all kinds of birds and animals but we can barely tame our own tongue.

[James 3:9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.](#)

We need to filter our intake, and ask Christ to cleanse us within so that we will see the world the right way and that the words that come out of our mouths would be appropriate for our identity as children and ambassadors of a holy God – that we are His representatives in this world, and that people would know that by our speech.

And now look at the last line of Psalm 15:

[He who does these *things* shall never be moved.](#)

In Hebrew, the ending is: He shall not be moved, ever. Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount about the man who built his house upon the rock. And when the storms of life came, his house stood firm. The winds howled, the storm surged, but the foundation remained secure because the foundation is a solid, durable, dependable relationship with God who Himself is unmovable and unshakeable.

David asked the question who can abide in God's tabernacle, who can abide in His holy hill and then gave us some answers of the kind of character that would require. Over a thousand years later, through David's descendants, Jesus entered the world to reverse the question. He became God dwelling with us – Immanuel.

And now, instead of just visiting a special tent on a special hill we can all have access to God at any time and any place through Christ. And instead of us worrying about dwelling with God, today the Bible tells us that He dwells in us – that if you have been forgiven of sin through Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in you, and He is transforming you day by day into the kind of man or woman described here in Psalm 15 – a person who could be described as:

[Walking] uprightly,
[working] righteousness,
And [speaking] the truth in [your] heart

Of course, that's impossible without Christ, but that's why He came. You see, David and others like him living before Jesus' day understood their sin – read the Psalms and you'll that they did. They knew they weren't blameless, spotless, upright, and full of integrity on their own, so they looked forward to the day when God would do something to make up for all they lacked.

They used the sacrificial system He had given them as a tool, but they trusted that one day He would do something solid and permanent, and now, this side of Christ, we understand that that thing was Jesus.

Jesus came to take our imperfections, our rebellions, our failures, and our self-centered indulgences and pay for them on the cross. So now, we put on the righteousness of Christ and become spotless and blameless *in Him*.

As another Psalm says,

Ps 18: 31 For who is God, except the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
32 It is God who arms me with strength,
And makes my way perfect.

Is He doing that today? Do you have a desire to dwell with God? Do you have a desire to know Him? He can be known. And you don't have to be perfect or well dressed to meet

Him. He will come into your life and make you into what He wants you to be. God doesn't expect to find you perfect, He intends to make you perfect – will you let Him do that today?

Let's pray.