

Psalm 15

Psalm 15 opens with a tremendous question. We can hardly fathom the magnificence and the depth of the question. It is this: "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?" Then that question is repeated: "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?"

When David wrote this, there was a hill that was a holy hill. That was Mount Zion. On Mount Zion was built the city of Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem was the palace of the king. Also in Jerusalem in King David's lifetime was a tabernacle, or tent, where the ark of the covenant was kept, so that the tabernacle amounted to God's house on the top of Mount Zion. That is what David is talking about here when he speaks of God's tabernacle and God's holy hill. After David, Solomon would build the temple there; but in David's day there was the tabernacle, which means that as David wrote this psalm, he could probably look out and see that tabernacle. There was the tent of God. Inside that tent was the ark of the covenant. And inside the most holy place, where the ark of the covenant sat, was Jehovah God. He dwelled with his people in that place, sitting upon the mercy seat of that ark of the covenant.

And now David, looking at that tent and then looking down the hill at all of the people of Israel, asks the question, "LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Who is going to walk up this hill and go into that tent and into that most holy place and dwell with thee thee? David knew—just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew before him—that the tabernacle was just a picture and a type of the real home of God, which is heaven. Heaven is Mount Zion. That is God's holy hill. That is Jerusalem, the heavenly city, the Jerusalem which is above. The tabernacle was a picture of God's dwelling with his people in the heights of heavenly glory, so that David in Psalm 15 is really asking "Lord, who shall ascend into heaven? Who shall go into the home in heaven that thou hast made, to abide with thee? Who may do that?"

That is a tremendous question, a marvelous question, because it is a question about covenant fellowship. Who may live with Jehovah? Who may be Jehovah's friend? Who may stay in Jehovah's house? And it is a tremendous question because it is asking about the *right* to do those things. Who has the *right* to go to heaven? Who *may* ascend thy holy hill and abide in thy tabernacle?

In the rest of the psalm, David gives the answer. He divides his answer into several parts. Verse 2 is one part, having to do with the whole life, the whole work, and the whole speech of the person who may dwell in God's holy hill. Before David gets to specifics, verse 2 is a summary of everything that has to be true of this person. What is the summary about this man's walk, his whole life in the world? "He that walketh uprightly," which means living one's life in perfect conformity, perfect uprightness, with Jehovah God. David is saying that if anyone wants to come into God's presence, that person must be as right as God, must perfectly conform to God. What is the summary of all this man's work in the world? "He that...worketh righteousness," which means that every single thing he does is perfectly according to the law of God, so that if you took that law and used it like a straightedge to measure every work that this person does, every work would measure up perfectly to that straightedge. And what is the summary of this person's speaking in the world? "He that...speaketh the truth in his heart," which means that all the words that come out of his mouth are nothing but the truth *and* that all of those words proceed from a truthful heart. David is saying here that the person who will dwell in the house of the Lord must be perfect in his works, in his life, in his speech, in his thoughts. He must be perfect through and through. He must be true and righteous altogether.

Then David begins to talk about some specifics. Verse 3 is another group of ideas but now that speak specifically to how this man lives among his neighbors. “He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.” That is, the way he speaks about his neighbor is not with malice, evil, backbiting, and reproach; the way he behaves toward his neighbor is not according to his own selfish thoughts to exalt himself and put his neighbor down; but he lives with his neighbor exactly according to the will of God.

Verse 4 begins with another group: “In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD.” This deals with how he views wicked men and how he views righteous men. The world has a certain way of viewing wicked men: the world loves and exalts wicked men. And the world has a certain way of viewing the righteous: the world puts down the righteous and kills them. But this man who ascends into the hill of the Lord contemns (despises or scorns) the vile but honors those who fear the Lord. He thinks about men the way God thinks about men.

The next group of specifics starts at the end of verse 4 and goes through the beginning of verse 5, and this has to do with how he deals with both God and men. How does he deal with God? He “swaureth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” That is, he makes an oath, and even though that oath is going to cost him—in fact, will be very costly to him and will even hurt him—he doesn’t turn back from that oath. And how does he deal with men? He “putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.” That is, he does not take advantage of the men around him. If he lends money, he doesn’t crush the person to whom he lends with usury on that money or take reward against the innocent, those who cannot pay back. This man swaureth to his own hurt—that is how he deals with God, before the face of God—and he does not take advantage of his neighbor.

And then David summarizes all that: “He that doeth these things shall never be moved.” That is the man who will come into God’s house and may abide with Jehovah forever.

And if the question is tremendous—“LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?”—then the answer is also tremendous: a perfect man and only a perfect man. The idea of this answer is not what the psalter number might lead us to think with its title. Psalter number 24 is a pretty good versification of Psalm 15, but the title of the psalter number is “Tests of Christian Character.” The idea is not this, as that title might indicate: if you do these things well enough, if you have this kind of Christian character, then you too can dwell in the house of the Lord. But rather, the answer to who may abide in God’s tabernacle is this: there is only one who may dwell in the house of the Lord, only one who is the man described this way, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who is perfect in his walk, his work, his speaking. He is the one who lived on the earth perfectly with his neighbor. He is the one who contemns the vile and honors the righteous. He is the one who swore to his own hurt, taking an oath before God that he came to do God’s will. God’s delight was not in the sacrifices of bulls and goats but in an atonement for sin, and so Christ came in our flesh to accomplish the atonement that all of the Old Testament sacrifices could not accomplish. And he is the one who did not take advantage of his neighbor but gives the riches of heaven and all his things to his people. *He* is the one who is absolutely perfect, and that means that Jesus is the one who shall abide in God’s tabernacle and dwell in God’s holy hill.

And now the blessed news of the gospel for the people of God is that all of Jesus’ perfection is counted as yours. Even though you and I do not live this way perfectly—what beginning we have of this way is only a small beginning, and we corrupt those things that God gives us to do, so that we could never come into God’s house by what we do—God nevertheless says to you, “You are perfect. *You* have walked uprightly, and *you* have worked righteousness, and *you* have spoken the truth in your heart. You backbite

not with your tongue. You don't do evil to your neighbor. You have not taken up a reproach against your neighbor. You condemn the vile person. You honor them that fear the Lord. You swear to your own hurt and change not. You put not out your money to usury nor take reward against the innocent. *You shall never be moved.* You may dwell in the house of the Lord and abide in his holy tabernacle—not because you did any of this yourself but because Jesus Christ did it perfectly, and his perfection is counted as your perfection, as if you yourself had done these things.”

So when you stand looking up at the hill of the Lord, looking up at heaven, with the question ringing in your ears, “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” the answer is that for Jesus' sake *you* may, as the one who in Christ is characterized by all these things. That is the blessed news of the gospel for the people of God.