

Before His Presence

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we have gathered as your children, and because you are a loving Father who watches over us, who hears us, who's attentive toward us, we know that when we are gathered, you are in our midst.

And that alone is what makes it worthwhile for us to be here. Amen. To express our love for you, to experience your love for us, to hear from your word, hear you speak to us, and to speak back to you in prayer.

So would you please lead us from the beginning to the end, and meet with us in a powerful way this evening. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we're in Psalm 15. It's a relatively short psalm.

It's one that is quoted a lot.

And at least a couple songs written based on this psalm. It's entitled, Psalm of David, Psalm 15. I will read it out loud for us.

[1 : 29] O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

Who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up reproach against his friend. In whose eyes a vile person is despised.

But who honors those who fear the Lord. Who swears to his own hurt and does not change. Who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved. A lot of interpreters of the psalm think that this psalm was part of the entrance liturgy.

So when the Jews entered the temple for worship, they would ask the question in verse 1. O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy hill?

[2 : 34] And then the priest would answer with the following verses that specify what the requirements are in verses 2 to 5. And then they would conclude with the blessing at the end, verse 5.

And he who does these things shall never be removed. So this is a hypothetical reconstruction. So we can't ever be sure of this situational representation.

But we do know that the psalm, that kind of entrance liturgy faithfully represents the concern of the psalm. Which is, if you want to enter a king's court, you need to meet certain criteria and to fulfill certain protocol.

What does the king require? And so here, the question is, what does God require of us? What does it take? What's the characteristic of a worshiper as you approach God's presence? And so let's look at the answer.

So that's the question in verse 1. And the answer is given, verses 2 to 5. So we'll start with verse 2. It says, he who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

[3 : 37] So the bar is set really high from the get-go. The person must be blameless. So nothing about his life must be susceptible to blame or fault.

And the word blameless comes from a root word that means complete. So it really refers to the way of life that is whole. So maybe an English word that captures it best is integrity, a wholeness.

The person who would enter the presence of God must be a person of integrity. And then the rest of the verses 2 to 5 explain what that blameless life looks like. It says, he does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

So the fact that he does what is right, of course, presupposes that there's something that is right and wrong. It's not up to the determination of whoever is in power or has influence.

But rather, there's something far more fundamental than that that goes beyond our conscience, which itself is susceptible to corrosion. And as Psalm 145, 17 says, The Lord is righteous in all his

ways and kind in all his works.

[4 : 43] And because the Lord is righteous, to do what is right is to obey the God who alone is righteous. That's what it refers to. And then, not only does being, walking blamelessly involve right action, but also it involves truthful speech.

So he says, and the phrase, in his heart, he speaks the truth in his heart, makes a direct connection between what's in our heart and what we speak, what we say. And as Luke 6.45 confirms, it's out of the abundance of the heart, one's mouth speaks.

And so sometimes, I don't know if you guys have seen that commercial. I don't even remember what the commercial was about anymore. But a guy hits send in an email, and he just freaks out because he's supposed to send it to one person, and he sends reply all to everyone.

And it was probably something inappropriate. And so he's freaking out. And so that's kind of, sometimes we think about it that way, right? We blurt out things, we say things, and then we try to backtrack and say, oh, I didn't really mean that.

But the truth is, what we say always means more than what we are willing to admit, because it comes from what's in the heart. And that's what the Bible teaches. And so he who walks blamelessly not only does what is right, but always speaks truth in his heart.

[5 : 59] And so that's the positive description of the blameless. And then it's followed by a negative description, what the blameless is not.

So verse 3, it says, He does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend. And this is important because both doing what is right and abstaining from evil are important.

And that's why we as Christians talk often of sins of commission, sins that we commit, as well as sins of mission, sins of omitting, not doing something. As James 4, 17 says, Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

So the blameless person not only must always do what is right, he must also never do evil. There are two sides of the same coin that can't be separated. And that's why it follows the positive description with the negative description, verses 2 and 3.

And they're kind of mirror images of each other. So he speaks truth in his heart, which corresponds to he does not slander with his tongue. He never says anything malicious or false about someone else.

[7 : 08] So not only does he do what is right, but also the negative counterpart, he does no evil to his neighbor. And not only does he walk blamelessly, and he also does not take up a reproach against his friend, meaning that he won't even entertain efforts by others to besmirch his friend.

He won't even take up a reproach. He won't give any currency to that kind of slander. And then verse 4 again goes to describe the positive description of this blameless person that God invites into his presence.

It says, In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord. And once again, the positive and the negative description. So he honors those who fear the Lord, but he despises those who are vile.

And sometimes I think people parade cowardice behind the banner of tolerance. So they're saying, No, we're going to tolerate.

We're tolerant people, so you can think what you want. You can believe what you want. But that's not true righteousness. That's not true blamelessness. The truly blameless despise what is evil.

[8 : 15] They despise what is vile. And so the righteous person hates the wicked, but honors the righteous. And the righteous are those who fear the Lord, it says. And so that's something that's applicable to us, and partly applicable to us.

Because we are not to honor simply those who have power, or simply those who have money, or simply those who are handsome or beautiful. But we are to, as Christians, primarily honor those who fear the Lord.

That's our primary criteria for the characteristics that we cherish in people, the godliness. And the rest of verse 4 further describes this walk of a blameless person.

It says he swears to his own hurt and does not change. Meaning that this person would rather suffer loss for himself than break his word.

And this description was probably the most surprising one for me as I was studying this passage, because we live in a society where words are cheap, right?

[9 : 22] I mean, politicians take their oath of office, and people in court take their oath. People who may be married take their oath of marital vows.

Yet all of those are so frequently broken, right? Perjury, divorce, and demagoguery among the politicians. And so, and we say that it's kind of like a, the fact that, you know, swearing or taking oath seems like more like a formality than something that we take seriously.

And so we say things like, oh, well, circumstances have changed, so I can't keep that word anymore. So, which shows that we, you know, really only keep our word when it's to our advantage. And so, but not so the person who walks blamelessly.

He swears to his own hurt and does not change. And I think there's a reason why the Bible takes swearing so seriously. It's because as Isaiah 65, 16 says, it says, teaches us to swear only by God, only by the God of truth, Isaiah 65, because he's really the only one worthy of taking an oath by, because he's unchanging and he's infinite, unlike any other basis which is changing and mercurial. And so, that's kind of really the fundamental thrust of the third of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 27, it says, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

[10 : 43] A lot of times that's kind of interpreted to think that maybe it just means kind of, you know, using Jesus' name as a swear word or something like that. It feels, it means something far deeper than that.

It means you should never take up God's name in vain, meaning you can't use his name alongside saying something that's false or not true, that won't be fulfilled. Because that's not only, not only does that besmirch your own character, but that profanes God and imputes his character. Because you have taken an oath or have sworn by God who is unchanging and who is truth, and yet you have lied, and you've taken his name up in vain. And so, keeping one's oath was for biblical writers, not just a matter of expedience, it was a matter of allegiance to God himself.

And, of course, Jesus later in Matthew 5, it kind of expands this commandment and brings its true ideal out when he says, do not take an oath at all.

Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than this comes from evil. In other words, everything we say at all times should be so completely true that simply yes or no should suffice.

[11 : 54] So that's what he's saying. But it doesn't seem to be kind of a literal sweeping legal prohibition because Jesus himself swears when a high priest forces him to it later when he's on trial by Caiaphas, the high priest.

But it seems to be rather an ideal teaching that we should strive for as believers. But because we live in a world where people's words are cheap, sometimes oaths are necessary.

But, I mean, isn't this such an ideal where you never have to distrust anyone because truthfulness is so widespread and everybody's honest.

And then lastly, verse 5 says, that he whose walk is blameless does not put out his money and interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. And this is referring back to God's commandment in Exodus 22, 25, where he says, if you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him and you shall not exact interest from him. And so the goal of the command was to prohibit exploitation, right? Because if you're having to borrow money, then you're poor, right? You need money. And by taking, by practicing usury and adding interest to what you lend to the poor, you're not helping them, but you're actually making their condition worse.

[13 : 18] And because of that, it usually was prohibited against the poor in the Bible. And according to one modern psychologist's estimate, they say up to about 16 million Americans suffer from some kind of physical or emotional stress from consumer debt.

And that's, I mean, the debt, people's debt frequently leads to anxiety, even divorces and suicides. And, but the one whose walk is blameless is not calculating to press one's own advantage when someone is vulnerable, but rather he's compassionate toward the poor, gives without thinking about his own interest.

And so as we kind of look at all of these different descriptions of the one whose walk is blameless, verses two to five, there's, it's striking that all of it deals with how to treat other people, right? It doesn't say, for example, who will sojourn in God's tent, who will dwell on your holy hill? And then it doesn't answer, well, he who diligently searches God's word and then communes with him in the heartfelt prayer, right?

It doesn't say that, even though that's surely true, right? To seek God's word and to pray. And I think this omission doesn't suggest that worshiping God and cultivating our personal relationship with God are unimportant.

[14 : 38] Rather, I think it's focusing on our duty on others because it would remind us that our devotion to God, coming to God in worship, doesn't just encompass our private personal relationship with him, but encompasses our entire life and how we deal with everything, everyone in our lives and everything that we do.

And that entirety of it must be worship. And he who is worthy of approaching God in worship is he who is always worshiping in all that he does. And Christians used to describe this kind of life with the Latin phrase, *quorum deo*, which means before God, the presence of God.

And that summarized the idea that Christians ought to always live in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the glory of God.

And the main point of this psalm, then, is that it's only those who live in the presence of God, who live with the fear of God, that are worthy to be in the presence of God.

So in every moment of our lives, we have to live as if we're in the very presence of God. That's what this is calling us to. And I think when some people think about that, you know, they go, oh man, that's kind of a scary thought, right?

[15 : 55] Like that seems kind of stifling or maybe even restrictive to think that, oh man, I'm living every moment of my life under the watchful eyes of God. But I think actually quite the opposite is true because if you think about it, driving on the road, and I think this is, you know, when you're driving on the highway and all of a sudden there you see a police car with the radar gun, you know, everybody kind of slows to a crawl, right?

And that's because they weren't breaking the law, right? For someone who's always driving at the speed limit, they wouldn't flinch when they see a police officer because they don't have anything to worry about, right?

But it's the people who are always breaking the speed limit that flinch and slow down even more than they're supposed to when they see a police officer. So it's the people who are breaking the law and doing whatever they want that are really living in constant fear, right?

And to kind of expand that, to extrapolate from that example, it's always those who gossip and slander others who are constantly afraid of being backstabbed by others or always are worrying that other people are talking behind their back, right?

It's always those people who are constantly taking advantage of others for their own gain. They're always afraid that someone's cheating them or they're being defrauded, so they're suspicious of people, right?

[17 : 12] It's always people who are double-minded or duplicitous in their motives that are living in fear of being exposed for being a fraud. So it's only the blameless, really, that can live fearlessly.

And that's what this passage talks about. It's only the blameless that can live fearlessly. Only those who live in the presence of God can truly dwell in the presence of God. And those who do that, the final promise, so the question, the answer, and the promise at the end in verse 5 is he who does these things shall never be moved.

He who's walked is blameless, is immovable. They're unshakable. And of course, it doesn't mean that that person will never suffer or experience setbacks in their lives, but that person is immovable in the context of this passage, which was, who will dwell in God's holy hill?

That person whose walk is blameless will always dwell in God's holy hill. He is always going to have God's presence with that person. That's the promise. And I think it's not a coincidence that the editor of the Psalter put Psalm 15, like by Psalm 14, because Psalm 14 just told us that no one's blameless, right?

Verse 3 says, they have all turned aside together, they have become corrupt. There's none who does good, not even one. And then it tells us in verse 15, the person who's going to be in the presence of God must be blameless.

[18 : 34] And I think that points to its ultimate fulfillment of the entire Psalter, of the entire Old Testament in Jesus, right? No one is truly blameless. No one can claim this promise for themselves to never be moved, but to always dwell in the presence of God, because no one has successfully lived every moment of their lives as if they lived before the very presence of God.

But Jesus did, and he fulfilled these commands for us. And because he, the perfect one, died for us and his righteousness is given to us through the cross and through his resurrection, that's why we can be assured now as believers, as we have put our trust in Jesus, that we can dwell in God's holy hill, that we can sojourn in his very tent.

It's such an intimate description with God. And that promise is really why we're here. That's why we can gather with the assurance that God is going to be with us.

And since God is with us, let's pray to him.