

Who May Dwell With God?

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- [0 : 00] We've been spending our summer in the Psalms. Today our sermon text is Psalm 15, the five verses of Psalm 15.
- It's another Psalm of David. The occasion for Psalm 15 is not given to us explicitly, but the theme reminds us of Psalm 24 that we just sang.
- Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? As I read Psalm 15, you'll be hearing the law and the standard of God.
- I'm not going to tell you up front what genre this is, but I want you to try to answer that question in your mind. And then about halfway through the sermon, I'll try to make that very clear as well. So as I read this, I do so believing that this is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and sufficient word.
- And if you receive it as such, when I'm done, I'll say this is the word of God and you say, thanks be to God. Psalm 15, a Psalm of David. Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle?
- [1 : 09] Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart, and who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend, 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. 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. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Would you pray with me?
- Lord, only you can cut us to the heart.
- We pray, Lord, that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will minister your word to your people. I pray that you'll help me to be very careful as I minister and exposit the words that your Holy Spirit inspired.
- [2 : 44] I pray for your Holy Spirit in every true believer to be discerning, to take only what is from you, and that your Spirit will apply it to our lives. I pray, Lord, that for the glory of Jesus Christ, the only mediator, that your law and your gospel will be distinct and also harmonious in the life of the believer.
- We ask all of this for your glory, for our good. Amen. Do you think it's true that there is no place like home?
- We say home is where the heart is. We think of a place where you feel at home. If we're pilgrims and sojourners in this life, like Peter wrote to the church, that's what we are.
- We should feel most at home right here with God's people, with the Holy Spirit abiding with us. Do you feel at home when you're with God's people?
- And there's no place like home, is there? In Psalm 15, David says, Lord, who may abide? Who may dwell?
- [4 : 06] Who can be at home with you? That's the question. So that's my question for you this morning. Who may abide or who may dwell with God?

On what grounds can you dwell and be at home with God? My first observation is the longing in David's heart in verses 1 and 2.

My proposition is that every heart has this longing. Every heart has a longing. Look at verse 1. The question on David's mind is this. Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle?

King David had his army. He had his family. He was thinking about the succession to the throne. Yet he longed to be somewhere else, not in the palace.

He longed to be in God's house, in that little tent on Zion, that little tabernacle. That's what his heart really longed for the most.

[5 : 13] And as king, we don't know what emotions he's feeling, but he certainly felt the responsibility over God's people. It was the king's job to provide all the provisions for the priests to be able to do their job and minister.

It was the king's job to defend the borders and keep the people of God safe and stable and at peace so that they can worship their God peacefully. But it was the king's limitation that he depended on this other office, the office of priests.

The king was not omnipotent in Israel. The king was a vessel, and it was the Lord who had to welcome people onto his holy hill. So there David is with this tension.

He's responsible and accountable, but yet he's powerless at the same time. One commentator pointed out how in 1 Samuel 6, there's the bizarre story.

It's bizarre to us because it's meant to shock us and teach us something about God. And the story is about the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God with his people.

[6 : 20] And as the Ark is being transported, the oxen that are pulling this cart stumble, the Ark gets rocky and it's about to tip, and a man named Uzzah reaches out and touches the holy Ark of God's covenant.

And the Lord strikes this man dead. John McKay, professor of Old Testament at Edinburgh, he wrote, quote, a right goal does not validate the use of improper means.

Wanting to help God, but doing it in a means that God has not ordained, doesn't make it okay. And his comment was that perhaps because David did not feel in personal danger in handling the Ark of God, David forgot to consult the Lord and pray over instructions on how to do this.

We read in 1 Chronicles 13, 11, that David was angry. David was emotional, perplexed, frustrated, angry, because this happened.

It was on his watch. He was responsible. Lord, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

[7 : 28] Who can get close to you in your covenant presence? We long to be with God, yet we know God is holy. We know that if we approach God by our own terms, he has every right to strike us dead.

But it's still the longing of every heart to dwell on God's holy hill. If you're like me, you have friends at work or others who say church is my, it's in the mountains, you know.

Where's your church? My church is in the mountains. I just love to go up there. That's when I feel like I'm at home. We read in Genesis that from the Garden of Eden, the rivers flowed in all four directions, and rivers flowed downhill.

So the Garden of Eden is this hill or this mountain where God came to dwell and to be worshipped by his creatures. In all of the Bible, the kingdom of God is represented as a mountain, as a hill.

But it was the plot of Satan to cause these mountains and hills to become a place where idolatry would happen, where people would go up to the hilltops where the trees were and try to worship the false gods there.

[8 : 36] Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? It's the longing of every heart. Ecclesiastes 3.11 says that the Lord has put eternity in the hearts of man.

Every man longs to be with God, the Creator. Every heart has that longing. My second point, though, from Psalm 15 is that the standard of the Holy God is fixed.

While we all have that longing, the standard of the Holy God is fixed. So what's the genre of Psalm 15? Psalm 15 is a legal psalm.

The theme of this psalm is the justice of God. You may dwell, you may live, you may abide with God if you do three things. In Psalm 15, it's you must walk, you must work, and you must speak according to God's standard.

Look at verse 2. You must always walk uprightly. You must work righteousness. And you must speak the truth in your heart.

[9 : 40] That's God's standard. You may only stay and abide and dwell in God's presence if you love your neighbor according to God's high moral standard.

That's what Psalm 15 preaches to us as law. And then he opens that up. What does that look like? In verse 3, you must never backbite with your tongue.

To backbite is to stab someone in the back by using your mouth. You must never do evil to your neighbor. The Pharisees tried to twist this and get themselves out of this high standard.

And the Lord Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. No one is off the hook. And you must not take up a reproach against a friend. You've heard someone say, are you picking up what I'm putting down?

Well, this, to take up a reproach means that someone took your friend and reproached him. Said all these bad things about your friend or mocked him. They put that down. You went over there and you took up that reproach against your friend behind his back.

[10 : 47] See, if you have done any one of these things, you cannot dwell with God. While we're talking about how well we love our neighbor, Psalm 15 piles it on even more and the stakes get even higher.

In verse 5, you may never hurt the poor with your money. Usury is an old term for doing just that. The Hebrew word is a picture of biting with your teeth.

Remember how in the Psalms he says the wicked, the evil, are like wolves. They're trying to come at me and devour me with their teeth, with their mouths. When you misuse the power God's given you, you're doing just that.

And you may never take a bribe against the innocent. It's not hard to become very wealthy in our country. All you have to do is have no moral standards.

You could be an expert witness and lie and hurt the poor. Make a lot of money being a false witness. If that's your goal in life, if you have that much love for money, you're devouring the poor.

[11 : 53] You're taking a bribe against the innocent. See, Psalm 15 teaches us that you will only be welcome on God's holy hill if you obey him according to his high moral standard perfectly, personally, and perpetually.

will you honor those who fear the Lord in verse 4? You see someone who honors and who loves the Lord and you treat them as a dear friend.

This is someone, they love the Lord, they love the same God as I do. That's the friendship that I'm going to value the most. This is a true brother or sister. And that's hard enough to do well, isn't it?

To love a Christian well. But on top of that, verse 4 says, you must also despise the vile person. That's something we've probably never preached very much.

To be godly, you must despise the vile person. That's the standard of Psalm 15. When you think the stakes are already impossibly high, it gets even worse.

[12 : 58] Verse 4 says that you must not change. If you don't do all of these things, if you say you will, then don't. You must swear to your own hurt by breaking the promise.

You must make a maledictory oath against yourself. You must say that if I am not loving toward my neighbor, or if I don't honor a person who fears the Lord, may I lose my home, may I lose my job, may I lose everything that I hold dear.

That's what it means to swear by my own hurt if I break my promise. So every heart has a longing to dwell with God, but the high standard of God, it's fixed, and it's not going anywhere.

So we're still back to our original question at the end of Psalm 15. Who may abide in God's tabernacle? I mentioned that the theme of this psalm is God's justice.

And if that's the theme, then Psalm 15 must teach us something special about God in relation to His justice. Before I tell you what I think it's teaching us, I want to be very clear.

[14 : 16] All of us have probably sat under false gospels relating to the law or the justice of God. So first, what does this not mean? How should this not be preached?

One way we can twist the gospel of God is to say because the standard of God is so high, He just lowers it. There really are no conditions for you to be counted as righteous.

God lowers His standard. I heard this at a funeral sermon. Lene was actually there with me. It was like the first time we talked about God, I think. We had a family in the school where we were serving and we went to this funeral at a big church in town and one of the pastors was running through the service and the message we all walked away with was that if you're funny and charming and more likable than the average person, you're going to be with God.

In other words, there really are no conditions, there's really no standard. That's the message. There was no ministry of the Word. There was no clear teaching about God's holy standard and what that means for sin and if there's no sin, there's no need for a Savior.

So that's a wrong gospel. It's a false gospel. James Buchanan, a Scottish theologian, made it very clear. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression.

[15 : 43] The same token is that where there is no law, there can be no objective righteousness. See, to say God has no standard or there really is no moral law, it does away with both.

There's no objective righteousness and there's no sin because what are you deciding that against? So to say there are no conditions or that God simply lowers His standard is a false gospel.

Here's another false gospel. You are the one who fulfills those conditions. Have you heard this version of the gospel?

Your final salvation, says this false gospel, it depends on your covenant keeping. Your obedience, your work, is what's going to fulfill your salvation.

Have you been preached this? In other words, only those displaying relative obedience to God's moral standards will be counted righteous. You must work harder to meet the standard.

[16 : 57] The principle there is do this in order to live. That's a principle of works. That's a principle of the law. The gospel says, live and you will do this.

There's a big difference. Romans 3.20 and so many other passages make this very clear. By works of the law, no one is justified in God's sight.

Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Amen? Now, as I'm trying to be really clear here, some of you are saying what you're saying is simple, common sense, that's just the gospel.

I've heard nothing new. There are others of you who have raised on a few conversations and the look you're giving me right now, it's refreshing. Thank you for making the law and gospel so clear from scripture.

It's not, it's not anything special. It's what God's word says. So here's what the gospel, according to Psalm 15, should be. Here's how we should interpret this.

[18 : 00] Some of our youth are going through with Jonathan our principles of hermeneutics, how to interpret the Bible. We're going to look at the context here. So the context, let's begin with the passage and then let's look at the surrounding psalms and then finally the Psalter as a whole.

150 psalms. And I'm going to keep it brief, just one or two from each. So first of all, are there any important phrases or clues from this psalm itself? Psalm 15. The first phrase is in verse 2.

Look at verse 2. There's a loaded phrase. He who works righteousness. It's the one who fulfills the law to obtain the blessing.

It is a principle of merit. It is a principle of law keeping that's preached in this psalm because God is just. He does not lower His standard. The question is, who is the one that can keep this law?

Works righteousness. The next phrase is in verse 4. Think about if this could actually mean you and me or David. Verse 4. He will swear by His own hurt and not change.

[19 : 14] Can David keep that standard? We all know He can't. You and I, we change. And we ask God for forgiveness. In verse 5.

He who does these things, here's the real clincher, shall, what's the next word in yours? Never. He who does these things shall never be moved.

God's standard does not change. It's extremely high. It's impossibly high for anyone under the curse of Adam. Amen? But if you're not convinced, just from Psalm 15, let's look at the cluster of psalms.

At least my view, we can talk more if you want to understand this. My view is that not only the words of the psalms, but also the arrangement of our whole Bible was under the supervision of the Holy Spirit.

So most likely, Ezra, as he's putting all of the psalms that the people of Israel have collected over their entire history, as he's putting it together, he's arranging it in a way that's ordained by the Holy Spirit as well.

[20 : 17] So looking at a cluster of psalms together gives us a context for the message or the theme of that part of the book. So we won't look beyond the chapter right before Psalm 15 and the chapter right after.

So let's turn back to Psalm 14 first because this was our psalm last week. In Psalm 14, verse 3, you remember this from last week, all have turned aside.

All have become corrupt. There are none who do good. No, not one. That's what we just read in Psalm 14 and then we come to Psalm 15.

That's what's in our mind. That's the context. He is giving the law and making it clear that none can keep the law to obtain their own righteousness. So that's the psalm right before.

How about the psalm right after? Let's go to Psalm 16. In Psalm 16, verse 2 first, notice what David says. He says, You are my Lord.

[21 : 24] My goodness is nothing apart from you. There's one to memorize, isn't it? You are Lord. My goodness is nothing apart from you.

In other words, if there is fruit, if there is goodness, good works, if there is law keeping and a growing longing to be with God, that's good.

But it's nothing on David's own. It's nothing apart from God. Well, let's look at the whole Psalter and if you've been paying attention to what we've arranged as the elements for today's service, you'll know which psalm we're going to.

Psalm 24. We sang this. Psalm 24, verse 3. The question in Psalm 24 is the same as Psalm 15. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place? This is a glorious psalm describing the Lord entering His kingdom. Be lifted up, gates.

[22 : 30] Lift your heads, you everlasting doors. Now look at the answer. Who is it that may ascend the hill of the Lord? Look at verse 10. The King of glory.

And who is this King of glory? It's the Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory. So the answer to Psalm 15 is answered by David himself.

It's the Lord alone who may ascend His hill. You and I are in a dilemma that's impossible. But God has taken what's impossible that sinners could dwell with Him and He's made it possible.

Let's celebrate the gospel of how He has done this. The only possible solution to sinners like us. We see the gospel in Psalm 15. You can turn there again.

Psalm 15, verse 4. That little whisper. That little shadow of the glorious gospel. Verse 4. The Lord is the one who swore by His own hurt.

[23 : 32] Psalm 10. Yahweh has sworn and will not relent. You, speaking to God the Son as Jesus Christ, you are a priest forever. Do you see how Psalm 15, Psalm 24, the whole Bible, God does not lower His standard.

But God the Son took on flesh and He alone perfectly, personally, perpetually obeyed, fulfilled God's moral law. And God decreed that our Lord Jesus Christ would become the Lamb slain for our sins.

As Revelation 13 calls Him, He is the Lamb that is slain from the foundation of the world. Jesus Christ willingly obeyed His Father. Isaiah 49.8, the Father promised, I will preserve you and give you freely as a covenant to the people to restore the earth.

Praise God that verse 4 says, our Lord, He swore by His own hurt and He is the only one who does not change. In Isaiah 50.7, we get the words from the perspective of the Son.

The Lord God will help me. I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a flint and I know that I will not be ashamed.

[24 : 53] Our Lord did not change on His mission marching to the cross of Calvary. Psalm 15.5 says, He who does these things. And in Hebrews 5.8, the Lord Jesus Christ, He learned obedience and He fulfilled the law and He shall never be moved.

Psalm 2.6 says, I have now set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. The Father has taken Christ with His finished work and put Him forever, unmovable, on the holy hill of heaven, ruling over His people.

Psalm 110.1, Yahweh said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. Our Lord Jesus Christ has done it.

He has ascended the holy hill of the Lord and He shall not be moved ever. Praise the Lord. Well, how does the holy God bring you and me to dwell with Him?

How does the holy God bring you and me to dwell with Him? David's longing in verse 1 was to dwell in the tabernacle of God.

[26 : 09] In John 1, we read that our Lord Jesus Christ, the very word of God, God Himself, the creator of all, has tabernacled among us.

The Lord Jesus Christ became God's tabernacle. He became the meeting point between the holy God and saved sinners like us.

As the ruler of God's people, like David, our Lord Jesus Christ, He is concerned for the well-being spiritually of His people.

Better than David, however, our Lord Jesus Christ, He does rule over you supremely. He's not only the king, He's also the priest and the prophet. He does have authority over His people.

He conducts our worship. God has made Him a better priest from a better order that cannot be shaken. Our Lord Jesus Christ secured this ministry because He submitted Himself to God's own law and He achieved it for you and for me.

[27 : 20] That high stake of verse 2, to walk, to work, and to speak, our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled because we can't. He fulfilled it for us.

Jesus always walked uprightly. He always worked righteousness. And He always spoke the truth in His heart. And this is good news because Jesus turned around and He preached in John 8.

Truly, truly, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. God's standard does not get lower. And the slave does not remain in the house forever.

But the good news is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He remains forever. And He's the one who became the tabernacle and brings you in and He says, in me, you are free.

You are not a slave to your sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ, He removed every barrier that could impede us from approaching God. And our Lord Jesus Christ, He sends His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of us.

[28 : 26] And He supplies us as a nation of priests so we have all the resources we need to serve Him in the ways that He's ordained. So who is it that can abide in God's tabernacle?

It's all those whom Christ's perfect life and precious blood freely cover. Amen. Amen. Romans 4, 7, And blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Romans 4, 24, Jesus our Lord was delivered up for our trespasses and He was raised for our justification. It's all the work He has done that justifies you.

The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. It's the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ that God freely counts to you and to me who believe in Him.

And when God gives you a new heart, you do long, like David, to be in God's house. Don't you? How do you know if you've been washed clean? You're at home with God's people.

[29 : 40] You long to dwell with Him more and more and to not go away. Let's stay with God. Well, this is not the end of it. This is our justification, but there's even more glory, more promises that God pours out through Christ.

The final question I want to open up for us is this. What happens to you and to me as we abide with God through Christ? As we abide with God through Christ, something happens to us.

it struck me that the tabernacle is a tent. It's not a walled city.

It's not a shining, expensive palace. But it's a tabernacle and it's enough shelter to protect us from rain and heat and from the storms of life.

You long to be in the tabernacle in this life, don't you? David was a shadow of Christ in His first coming.

[30 : 50] My understanding is that Solomon is a picture for us of Christ in His second coming. There is a glorious kingdom of heaven, not just a tent, but it's an entire city now that will descend and there will be a new heavens, a new earth and Christ will reign like Solomon did over all of the land, over all the world.

And when Christ returns, we will be with the Lord forever, not just in a tabernacle, in His house. Jesus was so eager to tell His disciples about His Father's house and He's not left us as orphans.

By His Holy Spirit, we are drawn to Him. We abide with Him through faith now in this little tabernacle on this earth. and as we commune with Him, we are being made holy.

Sinclair Ferguson said, to be holy or to be sanctified is to become like those with whom you are communing. Isn't that true? You become like the people you spend a lot of time with.

That's another reason we should stick together, stay with God's people, stay with the church. Ferguson wrote, sanctification is simply the outworking of communion.

[32 : 07] Do you see the difference in tone? It's not do this and live. It's live with God, abide with Him. And you'll have His eternal life. Sanctification means you are becoming like Christ by His power.

Buchanan once again commented, your increasing obedience to God's moral law by the Holy Spirit's power is a good thing. In other words, Christians should be checking themselves.

We should not be taking bribes against the poor or backstabbing our neighbor or taking up a rebuke against a friend. We should become more and more like Christ. But it's the effect of your faith, not the cause.

It's the fruit of faith, not the root. It's the evidence of faith, not the condition for faith. He wrote, as such, your sanctification cannot form any part of the ground on which your justification depends.

But according to 1 Corinthians 6.17, we have this glorious promise. Ken and the brothers on Wednesday morning helped me to see this one. Jonathan brought this verse to us. 1 Corinthians 6.17, we read this earlier in our service.

[33 : 27] You who are joined to the Lord, you are one spirit with Christ. Verse 19, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you.

From you, I'm sorry, whom you have from God and so you are not your own. For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's.

Do you remember how David was troubled that this Ark of the Covenant is so sacred no one could touch it or approach it? God has made that lesson very clear.

Moses, do you remember how the priest couldn't even enter the tabernacle because the glory of the Lord so filled the tabernacle? And at the dedication of the temple under Solomon, do you remember the same thing happened?

The priest could not even go inside because of the weight of God's glory. So when God's glory fills the dwelling place, everything else is pushed out.

[34 : 31] What a glorious picture of what the Spirit does in our sanctification. Because you belong to Him, our catechism says, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, He assures you of eternal life and He makes you wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him increasingly, progressively, more and more.

Last week we sung this powerful song, does the Father truly love us? He does. Does the Spirit move among us? He does.

And does Jesus, our Messiah, hold forever those He loves? He does. Does our God intend to dwell again with us?

He does. So long to be in God's holy presence. Long to abide with God through Jesus Christ, God's tabernacle in this life.

And know that He promises that as you abide in Christ, He holds you forever. You shall never be moved. Dwell with Him. T'was grace that brought you safe thus far and grace will lead you home.

[35 : 51] Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we praise You for Your grace from start to finish so that no man may boast. Thank You for Your powerful Holy Spirit who gives a new heart, who draws us to Yourself and who keeps us with You.

As we commune with You, You make us more like Your Son. All glory be to God. We ask that You will do this work in the lives of each one that You have brought here today, Lord, for Your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen.