

Psalm 15
A Psalm of David.

I. Psalm 15:1 — O Yahweh, who may sojourn in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?

Those are questions, today, that might be foreign to many professing Christians. It's often simply assumed that anyone is welcome in God's presence. God is good, and kind, and loving, and accepting, so come as you are. There's a certain truth to these words, but as they're often used today, there can also be a dangerous lie in them. "O Yahweh, *who* may sojourn in Your tent? *Who* may dwell on Your holy mountain?" And the answer, we can safely assume, is not just anyone. What qualifications or credentials must a person possess to enter God's presence? Is this a question that's of concern to *us*?

When a person sojourns somewhere, he's living there as an alien (a non-native) and therefore as someone wholly dependent upon the hospitality of his host. One commentator says that the sojourner "possesses no right of place but resides [only] because of the gracious permission of the landowner" (Wilson). He's the guest residing in someone else's country or in someone else's house. When we enter God's presence, we need to be conscious of this reality: that we're guests in *His* house, always dependent upon His gracious permission. Shouldn't this challenge our own assumptions? No longer can we casually walk into God's house; instead, we come with a profoundly humble attitude, full of gratefulness. I have no "right of place" here in myself. This isn't my house, it's Yahweh's house. A guest in Yahweh's tent is what David prays in Psalm 61 that he may always be: "Let me sojourn in Your tent forever" (Ps. 61:4).

What is it that's so attractive to David about sojourning in Yahweh's tent? Do we feel in our own hearts the answer to this question? The very first word of the psalm is, "Yahweh"—or, "O Yahweh." David isn't just praying to the Supreme Being who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, he's praying to the God who reveals Himself personally, by name, to those He redeems. Yahweh's tent, therefore, is the place where His covenant people experience the blessings of His presence with them, and where they're glad every day in His saving goodness (cf. Ps. 27:4-6); it's the place where His covenant people find refuge and shelter and protection. David prays in Psalm 61:

➤ Psalm 61:4 — Let me sojourn in Your tent forever; let me take *refuge* in the *shelter* of Your wings.

Do we understand now why David is so concerned with *who* may dwell in Yahweh's tent? Is this equally our concern—and our desire?

"O Yahweh, who may sojourn in Your tent? *Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?*" For the pagans, mountains and high hills were places where they could go up themselves into the realm of the gods and provide the gods with food and a place of rest and whatever else the gods might need (cf. Gen. 11:2, 4). But in the Bible, mountains are not a place where men ascend into heaven, but where God comes down from heaven to earth (cf. Gen. 11:5). It was on a mountain in the Sinai desert that Yahweh "came down" and entered into covenant with Israel (Exod.

19:11, 18, 20; Neh. 9:13) — a mountain that for this reason became known as the “mountain of God” (Exod. 3:1; 4:27; 18:5; cf. 1 Kgs. 19:8). It was on a mountain in Canaan that Yahweh came down to dwell in the temple (in his “tent”) among His covenant people (cf. 2 Chron. 3:1; Isa. 31:4) — a mountain that for this reason became known as Yahweh’s “holy mountain,” or, “the mountain of the house of Yahweh” (2 Chron. 33:15). God’s dwelling on the “mountain” represents the fact that it’s the God who dwells *in the highest heavens*, remote and inaccessible to men, who *comes down*, condescending to dwell with His people. What a wonderful thing it is, then, it is to be granted the privilege of ascending—and even dwelling upon—His holy mountain. David asks in Psalm 24:

- Psalm 24:3 (cf. Ps. 122:1-4 and all the Songs of Ascents [Ps. 120-134]) — Who may *ascend* into the mountain of Yahweh?

Not only does the mountain represent the condescension of God in coming to dwell among us, it also pictures God’s dwelling as a visible beacon of light and hope (cf. Ps. 43:3-4). Jesus speaks of the “city set on a hill [that] cannot be hidden” (Mat. 5:14). In Psalm 48, the psalmist sings:

- Psalm 48:1–2 — Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King.

And then we read in Isaiah chapter two:

- Isaiah 2:2 (cf. 27:13; Mic. 4:1-2, 7; Zech. 8:3-5) — Now it will be that in the last days the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the head of the mountains, and will be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it.

Yahweh’s holy mountain represents His condescension in coming down to dwell among men, it pictures His dwelling as a beacon of light to all the peoples of the earth, and finally, it symbolizes the fact that Yahweh is a strong fortress and place of refuge for His people. In one of the Psalms titled “*A Song of Ascents*,” we hear the people singing as they go up to God’s house on Mount Zion:

- Psalm 125:1 (cf. Isa. 30:29) — Those who trust in Yahweh are as Mount Zion, which will not be shaken but will abide forever.

The imagery of Yahweh’s “tent” on Yahweh’s “holy mountain” is imagery full of meaning and beauty for God’s people. Who of us would not want to ascend into this mountain and stand in His holy place (Ps. 24:3)? And so we’re compelled to *ask* with David: “O Yahweh, *who* may sojourn in Your tent? *Who* may dwell on Your holy mountain?”

Shadow and Substance

We need to stop, now, and remind ourselves of who it is that’s asking this question. It’s not just David; it’s David the *King*, Yahweh’s *Anointed*. And what is it that Yahweh says in the second Psalm?

➤ Psalm 2:6 — “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

If David has already been installed by Yahweh on His holy mountain as king, why should he need to ask this question on his own account? The answer is that the Old Covenant didn't contain the actual substance to which it pointed. Even though God was working inwardly and savingly in the hearts of Old Covenant believers, the Old Covenant itself, and everything that went with the Old Covenant, was temporal, and external, and typological; it was the shadow being cast backwards in time by the true substance still to come in the New Covenant. Therefore, the *typological* Old Covenant was constantly—*by its very nature*—pointing ahead to the New Covenant *substance* as the grounds for all the true spiritual blessings arising from God's presence among His people. Any inward and spiritual value of the Old Covenant types was due entirely to their typological relationship with the New Covenant substance. Yahweh's “tent” or “house” under the Old Covenant was a temporal, external type; a shadow cast backward in time by the true heavenly “tent” that was still to be revealed under the New Covenant (Heb. 8:5; 9:23-24). The Old Covenant “Mount Zion” was a temporal, external type; a shadow cast backwards in time by the true heavenly “Mount Zion” that was still to be revealed under the New Covenant (cf. Ezek. 40:2, 5; 43:12; Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 11:16; 12:22-24; Rev. 14:1; 21:1-4, 10, 22-27).

And what was the criteria governing who could sojourn in Yahweh's typological, Old Covenant tent, and who could dwell on Yahweh's typological, Old Covenant Mount Zion? Even these criteria were temporal and external types, shadows cast backward in time by the New Covenant substance. Only those who were ceremonially and ritually “clean” were permitted to sojourn in Yahweh's tent and dwell on His holy mountain. The physically uncircumcised foreigner, and the leper, and the person with a discharge (Lev. 22:3-7; Num. 5:2; Deut. 23:1-3, 7-8), for example, were ritually unclean and therefore excluded. We read in 2 Chronicles 23:

➤ 2 Chronicles 23:3, 6, 19 — Jehoiada said to [the people]... “Let *no one enter* the house of Yahweh except the priests and the ministering Levites; *they may enter*, for they are **holy**” ... [Jehoiada] caused the gatekeepers of the house of Yahweh to stand, so that *no one would enter* who was in any way **unclean**.

One commentator points out that “people of all cultures and times are aware that when one enters into the presence of a powerful lord or leader, one pays... special attention to decorum. One dresses well, cleans up, and watches one's manners” (Jacobson; cf. Gen. 41:14). If this is the case when one enters the presence of a mere human being, how much more must this be the case when one enters the presence of Yahweh, the holy God? But, of course, here the proper “decorum” will be of a completely different nature. Under the typological Old Covenant, what was required was a religious and ceremonial holiness. Apart from this ritual holiness, one was not permitted to sojourn in Yahweh's tent or dwell on His holy mountain.

But what about the person who was *ritually* holy, but *inwardly* defiled? He or she might still have access to the Old Covenant types (to Yahweh's Old Covenant tent and mountain); but since the true value of these types was only to be found in the inward substance and the heavenly realities *to which they corresponded*, therefore access to these types was ultimately empty and meaningless for the person who was ritually holy, but inwardly unclean (cf. Jer. 7:1-4, 8-10; Ezek. 44:6-9). Ritual and ceremonial holiness was a temporal and external type, a shadow cast

backward in time by the New Covenant substance. And so it was constantly—by its very *nature*—pointing the people to that true inward and spiritual holiness that was necessary if they would sojourn in Yahweh’s heavenly “tent” and dwell on Yahweh’s heavenly Mount Zion (both realities that would be fully revealed under the New Covenant).

David understood this. He understood, by faith, that he himself was also a type pointing to his future, greater Son, whom Yahweh would install as king not on the temporal and earthly Mount Zion, but on the true and heavenly Mount Zion (Acts 2:29-35). So when David asks the question, “O Yahweh, *who* may sojourn in Your tent? *Who* may dwell on Your holy mountain?” he answers not in terms of the Old Covenant ceremonial and ritual holiness, but in terms of that true inward holiness that encompasses the whole of one’s life. He answers:

II. Psalm 15:2 — He who walks blamelessly, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.

The one who walks blamelessly is not a sinless person, but a person whose way of life is “whole” and complete (Wilson) — perhaps we could say a person whose way of life is beautifully consistent in all its parts. The Hebrew word for “blameless” literally means something like “all encompassing.” So as one commentator says, it suggests a life “completely dominated and saturated by God’s will” (Jacobson). This is why David goes on to speak of one who “works *righteousness*.” The whole of his life is consistently an expression of the righteous will of God — of that which is “good and pleasing and perfect” in His sight (Rom. 12:2). And, of course, this man or woman or child that David is describing won’t be a hypocrite, but one who acts according to the innermost thoughts and desires of the heart. This is why David speaks in the third place of one who “speaks truth in his heart.” The point here isn’t just that this person tells the truth and doesn’t lie. The point is that he himself isn’t “false” (cf. Ps. 12:2; 28:3; 144:11). His life is not a lie, but corresponds genuinely and truly with what’s in his heart (cf. Josh. 24:14; Isa. 53:9; 1 Pet. 2:22). There’s a beautiful consistency between the outward and the inward.

So we see in the first place a person whose way of life is consistent in all its parts, in the second place a person whose way of life is consistently an expression of the righteous will of God, and in the third place a person in whom there is a beautiful consistency between the outward and the inward. This is David’s summary answer to the question, “O Yahweh, who may sojourn in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain.” But now David goes on to describe this person in more detail.

III. Psalm 15:3 — He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his companion;

Notice the emphasis on one’s “neighbor” and “companion.” In the psalmist’s context, a neighbor or companion was a fellow member of the covenant community —one of God’s chosen, covenant people. Today, then, our “neighbor” or “companion” won’t necessarily be the person living next door to us, or our “companion” at work or at school, but rather our brother or sister in this covenant community. Certainly, we ought not to slander, or do evil to, or take up a reproach against *anyone* (and there is a sense in which we should be a neighbor to everyone; cf. Lk. 10:29-

37), but the emphasis here is on those with whom we're in covenant together with God. The Apostle John writes:

- 1 John 4:20 — If someone says, “I love God,” and hates *his brother*, he is a liar.

Jesus said:

- Matthew 5:23–24 — “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that *your brother* has something against you, *leave* your offering there before the altar and go; *first* be reconciled to *your brother*, and *then* come and present your offering.”

The person who would sojourn in Yahweh's tent must love all those whom Yahweh welcomes to sojourn in His tent. How could it be otherwise? Our horizontal relationships with one another are inextricably bound up with our vertical relationship with God. We can never, ever separate between the two—though how often do we try or think that we can?

The one who walks blamelessly and works righteousness and speaks truth in his heart is the one who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his companion. In short, he's the one who loves his neighbor as he loves himself (Lev. 19:18). He's also the one...

IV. Psalm 15:4a — ...in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear Yahweh;

If the “neighbor” and “companion” is a fellow member of Yahweh's *chosen* covenant people, the “reprobate” is the one whom Yahweh has *rejected*. That's what the Hebrew word for “reprobate” means: “rejected one.” The reprobate is the one whom Yahweh has rejected because he walks *crookedly*, works *wickedness*, and speaks *deceitfully*.

If we would sojourn in Yahweh's tent and dwell on Yahweh's holy mountain, shouldn't it be self-evident to us that the one whom He rejects must also be “despised” in our eyes (Ps. 26:5; 31:6; 119:113; 131:21-22)? Despised not with a “holier-than-thou” attitude, but despised in the sense of having zero concern for their approval and no desire at all for their friendship.

If we truly despise those whom Yahweh has rejected, then naturally we'll esteem and honor all those who fear Yahweh. To quote David in Psalm 16:

- Psalm 16:3 — As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.

These are the ones whose friendship we will value (cf. Ps. 119:63) and whose favor and approval will always be most important to us (to honor [*ka-bed*] is to ascribe weightiness to something).

Who is the one who may sojourn in Yahweh's tent and dwell on His holy mountain? He's the one who despises those whom Yahweh has rejected, but who esteems and honors those who fear Yahweh. Finally:

V. Psalm 15:4b–5a — ...he swears to his *own hurt* and does not change; he does not put out his money at *interest*, nor does he take a *bribe* against the innocent.

The one who would enter God's presence is not motivated by the interests of self-preservation and self-advancement. He keeps his word even when it's detrimental to himself, he refuses to profit by charging interest on a loan to a poor brother, and he refuses to profit by being bribed to look the other way when the innocent are falsely accused. What he desires more than any temporal well-being—and as the source of his true well-being—is to sojourn in Yahweh's tent and dwell on Yahweh's holy mountain.

Self-Righteousness versus Covenant Righteousness

Is it really possible for any of us to measure up to this standard of holiness? Can any of us ever hope to sojourn in Yahweh's tent or dwell on His holy mountain? David was a sinner just like everyone else, and yet he said things like this:

➤ Psalm 18:23–24 (cf. 7:8; 37:18, 20; 101:2) — I was... *blameless* with [Yahweh], and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore Yahweh has recompensed me according to my *righteousness*, according to the *cleanness* of my hands before His eyes.

David isn't boasting. He knows that apart from God's grace and the faith that He imparts, he would still be among the "all" who have "turned aside" and who have "altogether... become worthless" (Ps. 14:2-3). He knows that any true "good" that He does (cf. Ps. 14:1, 3) must always be traced back to the sovereign grace of God in his life. So he prays in chapter 25:

➤ Psalm 25:4–5 (cf. 145:10) — *Make me know* Your ways, O Yahweh; *teach me* Your paths. *Lead me* in Your truth and *teach me*...

And we hear the psalmist say in the 119th psalm:

➤ Psalm 119:32 (cf. 119:27, 35) — I shall run the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart.

When David speaks of Yahweh recompensing him "according to [his] righteousness," he's not thinking of a meritorious self-righteousness, but a righteousness that's the fruit of faith and that God has promised to reward according to the gracious provisions of His covenant. So over and over again in Psalm 119, the psalmist prays:

➤ Psalm 119:25 (cf. 119:28, 58, 107, 116, 154) — My soul clings to the dust; revive me **according to Your word** [according to your *gracious covenant promise* to reward the righteous].

- Psalm 119:41 (cf. 119:76) — May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O Yahweh, Your salvation **according to Your word**...
- Psalm 119:170 — Let my supplication come before You; deliver me **according to Your word**.

When David speaks of Yahweh recompensing him “according to [his] righteousness,” he’s not boasting in a meritorious self-righteousness by which he has obligated God; He’s rejoicing in that righteousness of faith whereby he finds that Yahweh is true to the *covenant* by which He has obligated Himself. We, too, ought to be able to rejoice in our righteousness and the promise God has made to reward this righteousness with His favor and blessing — with the right to sojourn in His tent and dwell on His holy mountain.

We said that the person David describes here in Psalm 15 isn’t a sinlessly perfect person. Are we saying that “little” sins or fewer sins aren’t so bad? How can any person who still sins be blameless? The answer is simple and wonderful. The one who walks blamelessly and works righteousness is not the one who’s attained sinless perfection or who pretends sinless perfection; instead, he’s the one who refuses to hide or cover up his sin. It’s the one who acknowledges and confesses his sin who “speaks truth in his heart”; *this is the one*, as David says in Psalm 32, “in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

- Psalm 32:1–2, 5 — How blessed is he whose transgression is *forgiven*, whose sin is *covered*! How blessed is the man whose iniquity Yahweh will *not take into account*, and *in whose spirit there is no deceit*! ... I *acknowledged* my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not cover up; I said, “I will *confess* my transgressions to Yahweh;” and *You forgave the iniquity of my sin*.

And so we see again how a truly blameless and righteous life—the life that God rewards with the right to sojourn in His tent and dwell on His holy mountain—is itself the gracious *provision* of the covenant—the New Covenant!—that He makes with His people. It is, itself, made possible by the imputed righteousness of Christ (cf. Rom. 4:1-8).

When it comes to a *meritorious* righteousness by which we would obligate God, we’re all hopelessly guilty and condemned. The pursuit of such a righteousness can only be a burden of despair. But when it comes to a *covenant* righteousness—the righteousness made possible by God’s covenant with us and that He has graciously obligated Himself to reward—this is a righteousness in which we can “boast” and glory. The pursuit of this righteousness (which is, itself, founded in the imputed righteousness of Christ) is not a burden of despair, but a joy and delight. This is what explains, then, how David can ask this opening question neither with despair nor with self-confidence, but only with an attitude of humility and joy: “O Yahweh, *who* may sojourn in Your tent? *Who* may dwell on Your holy mountain?” And this is what explains who we can answer humbly and joyfully with David:

- Psalm 15:2 — He who walks *blamelessly*, and works *righteousness*, and speaks *truth* in his *heart*...

Indeed, as David concludes:

VI. Psalm 15:5b — He who does these things will never be shaken.

Since when did a blameless and righteous life ever look so attractive? What a joy it is to live that life by faith by which we're qualified to enter His presence; to sojourn in *His* tent and to dwell on *His* holy mountain. Already:

- Hebrews 12:22–24 — [We] have come to **Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

And so we look forward to the day described by John in Revelation 21:

- Revelation 21:10, 22–27 — [The angel] carried me away in the Spirit to **a great and high mountain**, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And I saw no sanctuary in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its sanctuary. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And its gates will never be closed by day, for there will be no night there; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. And nothing defiled, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life [—only those who walk blamelessly, who work righteousness, and who speak truth in their heart; cf. Rev. 22:14-15).