

“Life’s Most Important Question”

Psalm 15:1-5

When children are young, they want to have *all* the answers. But as we get older, we realize that more it is more important to ask the *right* questions. If you are buying an house or a car, the person selling it to you might tell you that everything works perfectly. But you know that *it is wise to ask the right questions* to find out the true condition of the apartment or car. If you are a single young person and think that you love a young man or lady and want to marry this person, your parents and friends will likely encourage *you* to ask the *right* questions. Ten years later, that will be far more important than *color* of her eyes or the way he *smiles*. Psalm 14, composed by King David, helps us with this question. It is a *wisdom psalm*—and asking the right questions is *an important part of wisdom*. In fact, this psalm asks the most important question of life. The Psalm consists of three parts: **The question, the answer, and the promise**. Let’s look first at...

I. **The Question:** “Lord, *who* may abide in your dwelling? *Who* may inhabit your holy mountain?” (14:1)

Some biblical scholars think this psalm might have been something that Israelites used as they traveled to the annual feasts in Jerusalem to worship the Lord. As they ascended up the mountain upon which Jerusalem and the Tabernacle (later the Temple) was located, this question would have helped them prepare to worship the Lord. These words, however, were not concerned merely with a person’s behavior during worship time. They pointed well beyond that.

To really understand this, we need to look back for a moment to the book of Genesis where God made Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. This was not just an extraordinary garden. It was *the place that God designed to dwell with man*. (Garden = Temple—the place where man met with God!) This was a wonderful privilege...until Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Their sin ruined this relationship. And so they had to leave God’s presence!

Do you remember what God did next? Genesis 3:25 says that He placed a heavenly being (known as a cherubim) at the entrance of the Garden with a flaming sword that flashed back and forth. It was a visible warning with deadly consequences for those who ignored it. When I read this account in Genesis, I think of a book by C.S. Lewis’ that we used to read to our children: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. One of the characters, a young girl named Lucy, asks another character, Mr. Beaver, about Aslan, a mighty lion, who typifies Jesus Christ. Her question: “*Is he safe?*” Mr. Beaver answers: “Of course he isn’t *safe*. But he is *good*. He is the King!” God is good, but because of man’s sin—He is *not safe!*

This is the great tragedy in the story line of the Bible. Adam and Eve and all their descendants lost the very thing for which they had been created—to know God, to reflect His glorious image and to enjoy a relationship with Him. But is this *the end? No!*

God made a promise in Genesis 3:15 He promised to save them from their lost condition. Years later God called a man named Abraham and *made a covenant* with him. He promised to make his seed into a great nation—and *through them* He would *bless all the nations* (Gen. 12:3). Though sinful man *cannot live in God’s presence*, God is already working to fulfill the promise He made in Genesis 3:15!

Later God called a man named Moses through whom God showed His people what He is like and what He requires in order to live in His *presence*. He promised to be their God and that they would be His people. But there was a problem. **God is Holy**—but the Israelites *were not* holy. So God used the Tabernacle and its laws of cleanness and sacrifice as *graphic* visual aids to teach the Israelites a course in Theology 101.

The Tabernacle demonstrated **two things**: 1) It revealed God’s mercy and grace in His desire to restore a relationship with His people.
2) At the same time, it illustrated *how* man’s sinful condition prevented him from having a relationship with God.

Ex. 26: 31
31 “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.”

The veil itself that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was instructive. Read Exodus 26:31. This curtain was a *reminder* them of their *past loss* and its *present consequences*! (Think back to Genesis 3:24). God is again dwelling in their midst, but there are limitations!! Holiness is a requirement—and is humanly impossible. The best they can do is *maintain a state of “cleanness.”* And that is a fulltime job. If they lose this state of cleanness (like when they were infected with leprosy), they had to go *outside* the camp—*away* from God’s presence! (Illustrate concept of **Holy—Clean—Unclean** from Leviticus). It sounds weird to us today. But it was actually an amazing object lesson that was *designed to bring home to them their internal sinful condition*.

Now let’s go back to Psalm 15 Picture yourself back around the year 1000 BC and you and your brothers and sisters are following your parents up this big hill, where at the top is a strange looking tent with an altar in front where they kill helpless animals. And inside are various pieces of gold-plated furniture. And near the back of the tent is that curtain. And behind that curtain is the Presence of God. And you are starting to feel very uneasy. *Suddenly* your father turns around and asks this question:

“*Who may abide in God’s dwelling? Who may inhabit His holy mountain?*” The words here aren’t simply to motivate restless children to be quiet and sit still for the next 45 minutes of worship. They are designed for all people of all ages to ask themselves: “Am I prepared to live in the presence of a Holy God?” Or “What *kind* of person must I be to live forever in the presence of a holy God?”

II. **The Answer:** The Kind Of Person God Approves (15:2-5a)

If you read these answers carefully, you will may recognize that they are practical examples of the **10 commandments**. They show us *what He expects from those who want to live with Him forever*. It’s as if the author, David, is saying: “You want to know what holiness *really* looks like? *Here it is!*” For people then and *now*.

A. His inner *character* (v. 2)

1. “He walks *blamelessly*...” The word in the Hebrew means “whole” and refers here to a person who is *whole-hearted* vs. *double-minded*). In other words, what you *say* that you believe is what you are actually *trying to practice* in your daily life. Do you talk one way at church and live differently at home or school or work? Or is there consistency between the two?
2. “He does what is *right*”- *Not* merely *knowing* what is right. But actively pursuing what pleases God (that which conforms to *God’s* standard). Are you a *doer* of the Word? (See James 1:22-25)

3. “He speaks the truth *in his heart*” The fool lies to himself. But the godly speaks truth to himself. Truth must begin *in your heart*. Do spend time in God’s Word and allow it to shape your thinking or decisions? Or do you rely on your own ideas and opinions? **The bottom line:** “If you don’t live it, you don’t believe it!”
- B. His relationships *with others* (v. 3)
1. “Does not *slander* with his tongue” Do you say bad things about others when they are not present? James 4:11 says we are *not* to *speak evil* of others. Gossip and slander have done great harm to believers over the centuries. The psalmist warns that there is no place in heaven for people who practice this!
 2. “Does no *harm* to his neighbor.” The example here moves from evil words to *evil actions*. Do you return things that you borrow? Do you respect the property of others? If you break something that belongs to another, do you try to make restitution?
 3. “He does not take up a reproach against his friend.” Are you a faithful friend? Do you *return good for evil* when a friend hurts or disappoints you – or do you try to *solve problems* God’s way by humbly approaching him? These are things that matter to God! (Proverbs 6:19b)
- C. His ultimate *values* (4a)
1. “...in whose eyes a vile man is despised (This does not mean acting in a hateful manner toward those who oppose biblical norms. It means *rejecting* their way of life).
 2. “...but honors those who fear the Lord.”

The idea here is not so much how we *treat* people, but how we *regard* them. Who are the people you look up to?? Who are your heroes? People who are rich or famous, even though their lifestyle is a mess? Or people who *sacrifice* for others? Fathers who faithfully provide for their families? Mothers who are faithful in caring for and raising their children? People who invest their lives in serving those in need?

God tells us that the one whom he approves *rejects* a vile man but honors those who *fear the Lord*.
 3. “...who keeps his oath *even when it hurts*....”

This is not talking about rash vows (like Jephthah in Judges 11). This is talking about trying to avoid keeping a commitment when you find that it is more inconvenient or costly than you originally thought. The one whom God approves is willing to make sacrifices in order to fulfill his promises. Why? Because he knows that when he makes a promise, God’s reputation is at stake. Do you keep your commitments—even when it is not easy? **Finally...**
- D. His *money* (and his attitude toward it) (5)
1. “...who lends his money without interest

Lending money with interest was not absolutely condemned in the Bible. It was condemned when it involved *taking advantage of someone in a desperate situation by charging a high rate of interest* (See Neh. 5:2-4 where the richer citizens charged their brothers high interest just to get food—and took their property and children as collateral).

2. “...and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.”

The person whom God approves is not motivated by greed and the desire to accumulate wealth, but by justice and the well-being of others (1Tim. 6:9-10, 17-19). Do you use money to *serve others*—or do you *use people* to help you gain more money and things? **Transition:** David then concludes with...

III. **The Promise:** “He who does these things will never be moved.” He is secure *because* he is **safely** in *God’s presence!*

Conclusion

So how do you feel after looking at these answers? How did you do? Truthfully, there are days when reading a text like this causes my heart to sink in despair. If we are really *honest*, we know that we do not live up to this psalm. On some days, *not even close*. David, the author of this psalm painfully acknowledged his own tragic shortcomings in his penitential or confession psalms (38, 51). In fact, no person has ever lived up to this psalm! *Except for One*.

When you look at these characteristics, whom do you see? You see **Jesus!** Only Jesus is absolutely perfectly blameless, always righteous, and completely genuine in his thoughts and motives. Only Jesus never sinned in the way He spoke. Only Jesus had pure convictions that he never once compromised. Only Jesus kept all His commitments—even to the point of dying on the Cross for sinners like us. Only Jesus has *always* valued people over money and things!

So what good is this for anyone here this morning? We are not just asking the *right* question. We are asking **life’s most important question!** *Who can live with God in heaven?*

When we look back at this psalm through the lenses of the Gospel, we understand that the characteristics which this psalm describes are not those that God *finds* in a person—but *creates* in a person *by His grace*. And this happens when we come to the realization that we *cannot in ourselves* do what God requires. Apart from Jesus, we deserve to hear the words: “Depart from me, you workers of iniquity!” Yet, Romans 5:19 says that “by the one man’s obedience, the many will be made righteous.” Jesus fully lived up to Psalm 15. And he lived His life to provide a righteousness that cannot be earned or deserved. He then went *outside* the camp to bear our sin and uncleanness by His substitutionary death on the cross when we trust in Him. *By grace through faith* in Jesus, those who “fall short” of God’s righteousness are viewed by God the Father as though this Psalm described **them!** This is how we are made right with God. This is how God removed the curtain that separated sinner like us from God.

If you turn to Jesus and trust in Him today, you will be given a new status that allows the Father to welcome you into His presence forever! And then He will begin to make you more and more like the One who *lived* and *died* for you! **Have you trusted Him?** If not, do so right now.

If you *have already* professed faith in Jesus, let this text probe your heart to show you your ongoing need to preach the Gospel to yourself. A Gospel that not only offers forgiveness and imputed righteousness, but a Gospel that transforms and motivates you to crave likeness to the One Who lived and died for you! One day, you will hear these words: ***“Welcome to my Holy Heaven.”***