

“A Picture of Righteousness”
Psalm 15
(Preached at Trinity, January 3, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 1** asks the question that has been pondered by multitudes for countless generations. Who will dwell in God’s tabernacle?
Most modern translations translate the word as “tent.”
The word **אֹהֶל** ('ohel) describes a tent but this translation risks capturing the full meaning. It is talking about God’s tent—His throne room. The Tabernacle was a tent but it was significant because it was the dwelling place of God. The NIV translates the word, “sanctuary.”
 2. The question is, “Who shall enter into and abide in the eternal presence of God. Following the pattern of Hebrew poetry the question is repeated in parallel form: “Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?”
This is referring to Mount Zion, the hill upon which Jerusalem was built, the site of God’s Temple. The question being raised is, who is worthy to dwell with God?
 3. This is a question that multitudes have raised in various ways.
The rich young ruler:
Matthew 19:16 – “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”
The Philippian jailer:
Acts 16:30 – “what must I do to be saved?”
 5. **Psalm 15** deals with the answer to this question – but it might be surprising to you.
 6. It begins with a superscription, but it is simply a statement of authorship, “*A Psalm of David.*” This is a question coming from the heart of David.
 7. **Psalm 15** is divided into three sections which I will set before you individually.
 1. The solemn question – **Verse 1**
 2. The soul searching answer – **Verses 2-5**
 3. The supreme assurance – **Verse 5b**
- I. The solemn question – “Who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?”
- A. For many the question is asked wrongly, that is, it is asked with a wrong focus.
 1. For many the question really is, “What must I do to escape the fires of hell?”
 2. We fear the wrath of God above all else. God has revealed His wrath plainly and all men tremble.
Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;”
 3. But notice David’s question is not, “Who shall escape the wrath of God,” but “Who shall dwell with God?”

4. We are legalists by nature. We are much more prone to ask, “Is this sin” than “Is this glorifying to God?” As a pastor I’ve heard the former question asked far more often than the latter.
 - a. What do you ask?
“Is it a sin to do such and such” or “Does this honor God?”
 - b. The difference is a important. Are you obeying out of a fear of judgment or out of a delight in God?
 5. This is the nature of our church covenant. It is not a list of rules to be obeyed. It is an expression of the members of our church to live to the honor of God.
- B. Here is the ultimate question. Are you merely concerned about escaping hell or have you fallen in love with God.
1. Do you avoid sin because you fear Him or because you love Him?
You want to dwell with God in eternity but do you want to dwell with Him now?
 2. David’s question is not just a future hope but a present reality. “Who shall **abide** in thy tabernacle?”
 3. David expresses this more clearly in **Psalm 27**
Psalm 27:4 One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.
 4. Salvation is not merely saving us from the penalty of sin. It is also saving us from the power of sin.
Romans 6:22 – “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”
God’s chief purpose in our redemption is that we might be holy.
 5. **Psalm 15** gives us a picture of this holiness.
It is not a list of rules that a person should follow to escape hell. It is a picture of those who love God. The question you should always ask yourself is, “Do I love God?” Do you desire to honor Him above all else? And the parallel question, “Do I love God’s people?” Are you harsh and critical towards God’s people or do you truly love them?
Love is not just a feeling. It is a heart of self-denial.
Matthew 22:36-39 – “Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? ³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

II. The soul-searching answer – **Verses 2-5**

- A. He properly observes the law – **Verse 2**
1. “Righteousness” is an expression that speaks to obedience to the law
Righteousness is defined by the law – the law is the standard. The law is a summary of all that God requires of men.
 2. Walking uprightly describes a life of moral integrity

3. This is speaking of a condition of the heart.
John Murray uses **Matthew 5** as an example of this attitude
Matthew 5:20 – “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”
 - a. The scribes and Pharisees had a high view of the law. It was an improper understanding but they held the law in high esteem.
 - b. Matthew is saying that our opinion of the law must be far higher
 4. For the Christian we love the law because we love Christ
John 14:15 – “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
1 John 5:1-3 – “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”
 - a. “Grievous” – βαρῦς – “heavy” – it refers to a burden.
 - b. How do you look upon the law of God? How do you view His commands? It is truly a matter of the heart. Your answer will help you to answer the solemn question of **Verse 1**.
- B. His tongue begins to be conformed to righteousness – **Verses 2-3**
1. Again, this is a matter of the heart – “speaketh truth in his heart”
In other words he continually recites God’s law, God’s righteousness in his heart.
 2. A person’s heart will overflow into his words
Matthew 12:34-37 – “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. ³⁶ But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”
 3. “He backbiteth not with his tongue”
 - a. To “backbite” describes wounding someone behind his back. It is hurting by stealth.
 - b. Do you talk about others behind their back.
 - c. A better question would be, do your words build up or tear down?
Do your words edify others? Do your words strengthen the church?
 4. And there is another side – we must not receive words that do not edify.
“nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.”
 5. God’s command is simple,
Ephesians 4:29 – “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

6. Do your words build up or tear down? The answer will help you to answer the solemn question of **Verse 1**
Matthew 12:37 – “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”
- C. He hates sin and loves holiness – **Verse 4**
1. This is testified by who he surrounds himself with
 2. It is testified by the models of his life. Who do you desire to emulate:
The rich and famous, or the holy?
Would you rather be beautiful or holy?
Would you rather be rich or holy?
Does your life testify your answer?
 3. How do you become holy? By giving yourself to the pursuit of holiness; by saturating your life with the Word of God; by surrounding yourself with the people of God.
- D. He is a person of principle – **Verse 4b** – “He that sweareth to his own hurt”
1. He is faithful to his duty – to others and to God
 2. The righteous man does what he says he will do
 3. This is testified richly in our relationship to Christ. The Christian has pledged allegiance to Christ. He follows Christ absolutely.
3rd Commandment - **Exodus 20:7** – “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”
 4. Jesus commands all men, “Follow me.” What does that look like?
Matthew 16:24 – “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”
 5. “To his own hurt” – even when it is not convenient. Will you be inconvenienced for Christ?
Your answer will help you answer the solemn question of **Verse 1**
- E. He is merciful to his brethren
Psalms 15:5 – “*He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.*”
1. He helps the poor without thought of return
 2. He doesn’t bring harm to others in the hopes of personal gain.
This may be in the form of money but it may also come in different ways. For example gossip or slander is always done for selfish reasons.
 3. Are you merciful towards others, even those who are undeserving? Your answer will help you answer the solemn question of **Verse 1**
- III. The Supreme Assurance – **Verse 5**
- A. If your life is consistent with these things you have great assurance before God
1. Listen very carefully. Remember, we are prone to legalism.
You are not justified by doing these things. We enter into God’s tabernacle through the righteousness of Christ.
But the person who is justified lives a holy life. He does these things.
 2. Justification is always intimately connected to a transformed life
2 Corinthians 5:17 – “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

3. God has saved us that we might be holy. Paul spoke of this continually in his epistle to the church of Ephesus
Ephesians 1:4 – “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”
Ephesians 2:8-10 – “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”
Ephesians 4:24 – “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”
- B. We have to understand the nature of God
1. David is asking the question who shall abide in God’s presence?
 2. The answer is clear, nothing defiled shall ever abide in the presence of God.
Psalms 5:4-5 – “For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. ⁵ The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”
 3. A proper understanding of the holiness of God is essential to any person desiring to dwell in the presence of God. It is essential to the worship of God.
 4. The man who abides in the presence of God must be holy.
1 Peter 1:15-16 – “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”
 5. It is a matter of the heart. Your mind towards your brothers and sisters in Christ will reveal your mind towards God.
Hebrews 12:14-15 – “Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: ¹⁵ Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled;”
- C. But when we have a heart for Christ we have great confidence
Psalms 15:5 – “He that doeth these *things* shall never be moved.”
1 John 3:21 – “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.”

Conclusion:

1. Who will abide in the presence of God for eternity? It is those who are abiding with Him now. It is those who are consistently living in holiness.
2. Only Christ will bring a man into the presence of God. Do you know Him? Are you following Him?
3. Our desire is to be continually exposed before God
Psalms 139:23-24 – “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: ²⁴ And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”
4. This must be our attitude before each other. Hold me accountable. Watch over me.