

The Changed Life

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Well, tonight we come to the conclusion of a brief series we've done on Christian sanctification. I'm encouraged by what we've been able to look at. It's been helpful for me. I know that sounds odd but sometimes when you're preaching, your preaching and your audience, humanly speaking, is yourself and so this has been helpful to me and I trust that the Lord has used it in your life as well. Think about the usefulness of guardrails alongside a road, upon a mountain road. It's a protective measure that keeps you on the road. One time many many years ago we were traveling across country doing an overnight trip with my brother-in-law and we were trying to travel far too far in a short amount of time and so we were driving overnight without sleep and our daughter, Hannah, was in the car, as I recall, with him and Nancy and I were traveling separately. Nancy will correct me if I get any of these details wrong but my brother-in-law kind of fell asleep and the car drifted off the road. He managed in the providence of God, gratefully he drifted off the road into one of the few places where there was a guardrail, hit the guardrail, woke up, as that might do for most of us, and was back onto the road safely. If it had been 50 feet either direction, it would have been a different outcome.

So the guardrails have a place for us and I say all of that just to kind of help you have a sense of what we've tried to do here with the series on how can I be righteous here, the question that will change your life, and what we're trying to do is to give you a sense of establishing some guardrails to kind of give direction to your focus on your Christian life and the way that you should think and what your philosophy of Christian living should be, and what it is that you give your attention to in your Christian life. It is important for us to be readers and studiers of God's word, it is important for us to be men and women of prayer, but we're talking about something a little bit different here. We're not talking about the avenues by which God communicates his grace to us, we're talking about what it is that we focus on in life and tonight's message is titled "The Changed Life." I figured if we're going to introduce a question to change your life, we ought to give something that talks about what that change should be.

And let me just give you a little bit of review. One of the things that we said about this question to change your life is that Christian sanctification is designed to cause us to live righteously. The point of Christian sanctification is to live your life to the glory of God, and you live your life to the glory of God by reflecting his character in your life. And so when we ask the question how can I be righteous here, we're orienting our thinking to

say, "Okay, these are the circumstances that God has given me in life. How is it, then, that I can live righteously? What would reflect His righteousness in this portion of my life?" And what we've said is that that is the priority according to Jesus' own words because Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." In 1 Corinthians it says, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." So there is to be this focus on glorifying God and living righteously and that in itself is a revolutionary thought for many, to realize that the point of Christian living is not for God to help you achieve all of your goals or for God to take away all of your problems by his power, sometimes he brings affliction and we're supposed to respond righteously to it. It's not preeminently about God helping us, although he does that and we're grateful for it, the idea is that we understand that we have a vertical responsibility to live to the glory of God and that is the focus of our Christian life.

Now we moved on from there in the second message of this series and said what is this righteousness, when we talk about righteousness what are we looking at? Well, we said a couple of things about that. We said, first of all, that the righteousness of which we're speaking is something that is about your heart, about your inner man, about your affections and your desires. We are not preeminently talking about behavior yet, we'll talk about that in a bit, but we realize that it starts inside. In 1 Samuel 16:7 it says God does not see as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart, and so there is to be an emphasis on the inner man that we cannot overlook. This is where hypocrisy finds its fertile soil when people conform to external standards and yet neglect the heart attitudes that constitute true righteousness. And so it's a heart-centered righteousness of which we speak, and we added that it's a Christ-centered righteousness. Paul said in Philippians 3 that his great desire is that, "I might know Him and the power of His resurrection." And so this righteousness and these desires that flow from true salvation give us desires that preeminently want to glorify God and to know Christ.

And then we looked on last week and we saw, we said what are these heart attitudes, then, that righteousness is expressed in? What do righteous attitudes look like? And we freely acknowledged that we weren't being comprehensive but just suggestive in saying that there's a vertical dimension to this righteousness. There is a heart attitude, a godly heart is a heart of thanksgiving. 1 Thessalonians 5 it says, "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus," comprehensive approach to life to live with a godly attitude of thanksgiving, of gratitude, of giving thanks. And you know, those of us that are bent toward pessimism and complaining spirits, this is a rebuke to us. This is a rebuke to our ungrateful hearts to realize that righteousness is found expressed in a heart of thanksgiving and, you know, the Christians that live with and manifest this thankful attitude in their lives, they stand out, don't they? When you find people that are thankful when they're laying in a hospital bed, people that are thankful and giving thanks to God and praising God in the midst of adversity or life difficulties, that stands out and the reason it stands out is because it is so different from the world.

And you know, like I say, I started out saying, you know, this series is primarily preaching at myself here and preaching to myself here, but we must understand that this

thankfulness is something that is in everything, in every aspect of life. This is what righteousness looks like. We find reasons to praise God in the midst of everything and how could it be any other way? When we enter into salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, when we come to Christ as guilty sinners, condemned and helpless to do anything to save ourselves and we cry out for mercy and Christ forgives us, receives us, pardons all of our sins, and God accepts us as righteous for the sake of his Son, through no merit of our own, through no preparatory works that we have done, we come as a guilty sinner to Christ, we ask for mercy and he opens, as it were, his arms wide to us and welcomes us into the family of God. Now I ask you, if you know that true biblical salvation, how could you have anything other than a grateful heart, vertically speaking, that God has been so kind to you in your sin? There's no other way that it could be and so this thanksgiving is central to the heart attitude of righteousness that is to be manifested.

So you find yourself in life, you find yourself in sorrow, difficulty or joy and prosperity, you ask yourself how can I be righteous here, you say, "Well, let's start with my heart and my heart needs to be thankful. Not complaining. I'm going to be thankful. I'm going to redirect my affections toward thanksgiving because I'm mindful of what Christ has done for me, the mercy that's been showered on me. I can't be anything other than thankful to Him, no matter what." And we added that another vertical dimension to it is just the whole idea of trust, that I'm confident in God's work in my life as it will play out in the future. I am at peace with how God will care for me even though I don't understand and things are difficult right now. I'm confident, I'm content in what I have because I trust God and I trust that the life that I have is the life that he has given me. And so I trust him for that even though I might be in need, even though I might be sorrowful. I trust him for that. I'm thankful to be in Christ and a heart that is saturated with that kind of disposition toward God, my friends, is a heart that is living righteously. And in every day and every circumstance, we can orient our perspective by saying, "How can I be righteous here? Ah, I know what, I need to be thankful, I need to be trusting." And if you establish those principles in your mind and respond to them consistently, you know what you're going to find? You're going to find that you're growing spiritually when you consistently apply this to your heart and to your life on a consistent day by day basis.

This is the heart of Christian living, my friends. This is what it means to be a child of God. A child, a godly child, speaking on a human level anyway, a godly child loves his father, right? A godly child trusts his father under ordinary circumstances, and so there is this human orientation that not all of us have experienced, I understand that, but in a healthy situation there is an understanding that my father is the one who cares for me. He protects me. He watches over me. And I rest under the shade of that tree. Well, however our earthly fathers may have failed us in that position that they have, God holds that position of care and trust and he does it perfectly, and he does it faithfully, and he loves us through it all. And so we come and we sit under that tree and we rest and we thank him and we trust him for what he's going to do, and we're confident and we're content no matter what our present circumstance today may be. That's what righteousness looks like.

So that leaves us with one final aspect to consider here tonight. Tonight, and let me just preface it this way, in this manner, is that if that kind of trust and thanksgiving centered

on Christ is the focus of your life and you're nurturing that and developing that in every aspect of life, well, I want to tell you that that's going to express itself horizontally in your life before men. It will express itself in your relationship with your spouse, with your children, with your parents, with those around you; those in the circle of your influence and your circle of love, it's going to spill over to them and it could be no other way. You couldn't really have those attitudes animating your disposition toward God and not have it animate your disposition toward men. And so when there are problems horizontally in your relationships and there's conflict and there's all of that, well your first responsibility is not to blame the other person or to make accusations or to deflect blame. If you find yourself consistently in conflict, here's what you need to do, my friends, and I say it sympathetically, having walked this road myself so many times, I speak from experience, you have to step back and say, "There must be something about me that needs to change here, somewhere I've lost sight of being thankful to God and trusting God and orienting my life toward righteousness," because your relationships are a mirror to you of the nature of what you're like. There is really no denying that. Scripture says when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Well, what does that mean when you can't get along with your spouse? You know, when a child can't get along with their parents? If your life is just consistently marked by conflict and trouble and disagreements and all of that, my Christian friend, my brother, my sister in Christ, honestly you really do need to step back and you need to start with this presupposition: I bet the problem somehow starts with me. I bet there's change that needs to take place in me as an orienting thought. That doesn't mean that others aren't contributing to the problem, it doesn't mean that your spouse hasn't sinned against you, but if you have multiple relationships defined by conflict, you know, I like to say this, the common denominator, the common person in all of your difficult relationships, every single one of them, the common denominator in all your problem relationships is you. You're present in every one of them. Maybe we can start by humbling ourselves and saying, "Lord, whatever You do in the lives of someone else, whatever You do in my spouse or my child, Lord, start the change in me. Work in me so that I would become this righteous godly person that I've seen described in Scripture. Work in me that I would be thankful and trusting before You. Work in me that my heart would be cleansed and would love Christ and would be satisfied and content in Christ no matter what." You know, if we all did that just within the 80 or 100 people that are here tonight, if we all did that, if we all started right there, things would change a lot dramatically really quickly, if we all started there and looked in the mirror instead of across the room. You know, this is just the way that it is.

But tonight what we want to do with that review which I hadn't really planned to get into but I'm glad we did, kind of makes this a whole capstone message, tonight I want to look at the changed life horizontally from the perspective of a passage we've looked at a couple of times in the past from this pulpit, Psalm 15, and I would invite you to turn there to Psalm 15. We could have, perhaps, turned to Psalm 112 that talks about the man who fears God, or Psalm 1, we could have looked there, but we're going to go to Psalm 15 because it is so very practical in its application and I've cherished this Psalm over the years and taught on it more than a few times.

Psalm 15. Before I read it, we'll frame it with this question: how does a thankful trusting heart change your life? How does it express itself in human relationships and in your own character? That's what we're going to see tonight and we'll cover it all rather quickly, I would say. Famous last words, I know.

Psalm 15, beginning in verse 1.

1 O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? 2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,

Do you see the word there again? It's just everywhere.

2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. 3 He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; 4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; 5 He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

Biblical salvation transforms a man. It transforms a woman. It changes them into someone new. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come." When a man is born again, God imparts new life to him, imparts life to him that is morally a reflection of the life and the character and the moral attributes of God himself. So when supernatural life is imparted to you from a holy God, there is going to be aspects of holiness that flow out of your own life. And we've reviewed this so many times, 1 John 2 speaks of this and on and on we could go, what I want you to see is this, is that true biblical Christianity is more than having sentimental thoughts about Jesus Christ, it's more than, not that we practice this here in this church but it's good to have a perspective, it's more than walking an aisle one day and praying a prayer and then going back to life the way it used to be. That is not Christianity at all. That's some kind of cheap fraud done in the name of Jesus that if your life doesn't change, it's not the real thing because God saves a man, he saves a woman, he saved you in order to make you holy, to make you a moral reflection of his own character even if you do that imperfectly. You are to be transformed from one image of glory to another, as 2 Corinthians 3:18 says. There is to be this transformation where over the course of time your life more and more becomes like Christ himself as the Spirit of God works within you, as the word of God changes your thinking, as God uses trials to discipline you and to wean you from a love of the world and a love of sin. Salvation, true biblical salvation always without exception transforms a man, and a man who knows nothing about transformation is a man who has no claim on being a true Christian no matter what he says with his lips.

And so it's very important for us to understand that and that is the question that frames the opening of Psalm 15. Look at it there in verse 1 with me. He asks a question, David does, he asks a question at the start of the Psalm so that he may answer it in the verses

that follow, and so he somewhat rhetorically, I suppose you could say, he asks the question,

1 O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?

The idea is this, "God, who is it that has fellowship with You? Who is it that shares life with You and shares communion with You?" And he proceeds to answer the question in what follows. You see, David understands something about the holiness of God as he asks this question. "God, You are perfect in Your holiness. You are holy, holy, holy," as the angel said in the hearing of Isaiah, "and when You are holy and man is sinful, how can anyone have fellowship with You? How can anyone dwell comfortably in Your presence?" Well, the answer presupposes salvation by faith alone because we can't work our way into that kind of holiness, we must have holiness given to us as a gift, so he's presupposing salvation by faith alone, but he's focusing on something other than that here in Psalm 15, he's focusing on the practical life nature of holiness and it's important for you to understand that. Not every text of Scripture is trying to communicate every aspect of biblical salvation in what it says. It's legitimate for a text, it's legitimate for a sermon to focus on one particular thing and highlight that and explain it thoroughly, leaving other aspects of truth to be found in other passages of Scripture. So Psalm 15 is not a roadmap for the sinner to find salvation, it is an explanation of how the one who belongs to God already is to live, and understanding that can keep you from a lot of misunderstanding as you go through this brief Psalm.

Now do me a favor and just pick up your Bible and hold it in your hand for just a second and realize that it's a big, long, heavy book, okay? There are 66 books in the one true Bible. There are hundreds of chapters. There are thousands and thousands of verses in there, much of it directed toward helping us understand God's holiness and the way that holy people are to live. That means, then, when you come to a five verse Psalm like Psalm 15, you immediately should understand something important: David is not trying to give us a comprehensive answer to everything that God requires from his people in their lives. He's not trying to give a comprehensive answer that includes New Testament revelation, he lived a thousand years before the Bible was written, he couldn't have been having New Testament revelation as we know it in mind. But beyond that, my friends, there's something, a negative observation that you can make about this text that I think is very important to understand: David, writing in the Old Testament dispensation, omits many many things that God himself commanded in the Old Testament. This is a stunning observation that opens up an understanding of this Psalm to you. You know, we read it earlier. Psalm 15 says nothing about avoiding the sins of murder and hatred, avoiding adultery, avoiding theft, and those things are embedded in the 10 Commandments. David doesn't speak about those. That doesn't mean he forgot. That doesn't mean that David needed to go back and read his Bible. It simply tells us and clues us into the fact that David's not trying to be comprehensive in what he says here. You go on remembering that he's writing in the days of the Old Testament, there's nothing in Psalm 15 that talks about sacrifices or reading Scripture or even praying. That's fascinating to me. There's a

whole realm of really important things that David doesn't address and we know they're important because they're emphasized elsewhere in Scripture.

Well, then what is he doing in Psalm 15? My friends, David is assuming those matters without repeating them. What David is giving us here is it's like, you know, if you go to Costco, not that David was ever at Costco of course, sometimes you just say things that don't even need to be said, I do anyway, but Costco, you come to Costco and, you know, you get samples and they give you samples, they give you a little taste of the other things that are available in their inventory of goods. David here is giving us a sampling, he's giving us representative statements about the horizontal dimension of a righteous life that stimulate our thinking, and if a man comes to this text and embraces the things that are found here in Psalm 15, something will happen naturally, the other aspects of things that are not mentioned will take care of themselves.

So David is giving us signposts, he is giving us a sample, he's giving us representative statements, not a comprehensive list, he's just giving us a representative approach that helps us see the nature of life lived in a righteous way. His primary point is this, is that God requires righteousness if we want fellowship with him. It's a travesty, it is a waste of time to think that you are walking with God if you are walking in sin. Those two paths do not intersect with each other, and so what David does here is he gives us five different areas for self-examination, stunningly practical, stunningly broad in their scope. This is another example of the Holy Spirit in his genius of omniscience giving us so much in a condensed form that it would take a lifetime to actually live it all out and here we can read it in 30 seconds if we read it verbally.

Well, let's look at these five areas that David has given us. First of all, he addresses your character. He addresses your character. He starts with a summary statement in answer to the question, "Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" He starts with a summary statement that includes everything that follows. He says, look at it there in verse 2 with me. Remember, he's answering the question, "Who may dwell with You, O holy God?" Verse 2, he starts to answer his own question. He says,

2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth
in his heart.

He uses this word "integrity," a life of integrity. This is a term that refers to someone who is complete, who is genuine, who is reliable. In other words, his life is consistent. Not perfect, not sinless, but consistent. This is a man who strives to apply the entire word of God to his entire life. Watch this, he doesn't carve out exceptions for himself from the applicability of God's word. When he is confronted with Scripture that addresses an area of sin in his life, he doesn't try to redefine the Scripture, the woman doesn't try to find ways around that Scripture and its convicting power in his life or her life, they embrace it, they say, "Oh, Scripture speaks to me here. I must need to repent and change and conform my life to the word of God." He doesn't look for ways to avoid that, he embraces it because his life is consistent under the authority of the word of God. That's really important. You could look at it from another perspective, is that this is a person who is

the same person on Thursday afternoon as he is on Sunday morning in the conscious presence of the people of God. What comes out of his mouth on Thursday is consistent with what comes out of his mouth on Sunday when people are watching. This is the person who is consistent in private as much as when somebody is watching. There is integrity there. There's not this double life. There's not this hiding of sin that is going on. There's integrity to it.

So look at it there in verse 2, he walks with integrity and he works righteousness. This is the pattern of his life, is that his life is oriented toward righteousness. This is the whole thing we've been talking about for the past month, isn't it? How can I be righteous here? You know, apparently the answer to that question matters to the Bible and therefore it matters to us. And we see something else in keeping with what we've been saying over the past few weeks, there at the end of verse 2, he speaks truth in his heart. It's a heart-centered righteousness. Do you see it there? You see, I'm not making this stuff up. I'm just showing it to you on the surface of Scripture there. He speaks truth in his heart. It is an internal dynamic. He loves – watch this – he or she, she loves the truth of God, loves the truth of God's word and exhibits truthfulness in the things that he or she thinks about truth. Truth is a priority to him. He hates every false way. He hates lies. He finds himself uncomfortable in the kind of culture in which we live today where deception is a way of life, it's a way of politics, it's a way of personal dealings, and he finds himself because he speaks truth in his heart, he finds himself saying, "You know what? I don't fit here. I don't fit in this world. I'm uncomfortable here. The things that drive the world and culture around me are things that are foreign to my inner desires and affections," because he embraces, he speaks truth in his heart. It's an internal dynamic.

So this is a man or woman over time who examines his life to conform it to God's word. That's the most important thing in the world to him is this wonderful beautiful book. He could literally kiss it as an expression of the affection that he has for the truth of God's word, and so he loves God's word enough to want his life to conform to it, to love the Savior who rises up out of its pages. I know there are a lot of young people in the audience tonight and I'm grateful for every one of you and I pray for every one of you, those of you that are sitting back there. I pray for every one of you by name, but I just invite you as you're shaping your life at the start here, to ask yourself whether that describes you or not. You know, do you come to, do you participate in the life of the body of Christ because you have a love for truth in your heart, or is this just simply purely a social thing for you? We adults need that question too, don't we? Adults, us old folks is what I mean by that. Is this simply about social activity and just having friends, or is your inner man driven by a love for the truth of the word of God? Is that what's in your heart? You need to ask that question because it's only the person who loves truth in his heart that has real fellowship with God. And if you're comfortable practicing deception to people that are close to you, people that aren't close to you, if truth is a matter of indifference to you, oh boy, you really need to re-examine life and rethink everything that you're doing because the only one that dwells on God's holy hill is one who walks with integrity and speaks truth in his heart. And Jesus said, Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they and they alone shall be satisfied." They and they alone will be called sons of God as they go on to express

peacemaking in their life. These are the only ones. There's not another avenue to fellowship with God. There is love for truth or you're not in fellowship with God.

So after this general statement that David makes in Psalm 15. He says, you know, he walks with integrity. Go back to Psalm 15 with me if you ever turned away there. He makes this general statement, "He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart." His character. His character is true. It's submitted to the word of God. There's this pulsating nonstop presence and principle in his heart that always comes back to the word of God as the center of gravity in his life. That's the character of one who has fellowship with God. I'll just say it one more time, make sure that nobody gets lost in the weeds here. We're not talking about sinless perfection here. Part of the truthfulness that David speaks of is an open free confession of sin. You sin, you confess it to God. You hide nothing. You sin against your mate, you go and you confess it. You know, you go and you try to make it right. You don't just ignore the past and try to whitewash it over. You go back and say, "You know what? I know that hurt you. I'm sorry. I'm going to do better next time." Things of that nature.

So there's this integrity, there's this character that marks the one who has true fellowship with God. Well, secondly, let's keep moving on here and talk about your communication. Your communication. David now focuses, as the Psalm progresses, on how the believer uses his tongue. What comes out of your mouth. Verse 3,

3 He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

David speaking about the power of the tongue reminds me of some of the things that James said. You know, the tongue is a fire and such a small thing directs the course of our lives. David addresses that with three negatives here in the verse. He says number 1, he does not slander, he does no evil to his neighbor, he does not take up a reproach against his friend. This is a man who has forsaken gossip. He refuses to speak the evil against someone. Gossip is the destruction of many lives and many churches. Backbiting. Critical spirit. The righteous man wants nothing to do with it. He does more than just refusing to speak it, this stands out to me and it always has since I first studied this Psalm in any depth many years ago, he says in verse 3, "Nor takes up a reproach against his friend." This righteous man not only refuses to speak the evil, he refuses to hear it. He refuses to hear it. Someone comes to him with an unsubstantiated report against his friend, he says, "I don't even want to hear that." So committed to righteousness and truth is he that he'll interrupt someone and just say, "Stop. I don't want to hear this." Charles Spurgeon said this and I quote, "He is a fool who receives stolen goods and keeps them. In slander as well as robbery, the receiver is as bad as the thief. If there were no gratified hearers of ill reports, there would be an end of the trade of spreading them." He goes on to say, "Call for a policeman, we say if we see a thief at his business. Should we feel no indignation when we hear a gossip at her work?"

You see, and this is not just individual and personal, this is corporate for the body of Christ here in what I'm saying here, and to the best of my knowledge I think that our

church does a pretty good job of what I'm talking about but that doesn't mean we don't need to have these things said to us from God's word and from the pulpit. You need to be on guard not only about what you say but what you receive, and to be a discriminating hearer of the conversations that come your way. When you find somebody being particularly critical, gossipy, slandering, speaking ill of someone else in the body of Christ, you need to just put your hand up and say, "Please stop. I do not want to hear about this in the body of Christ. This is not appropriate." And it takes some courage to say that but let me use a different adjective, it just takes some righteousness to live life that way because this is what David is describing, this is part of the righteousness that works out in the life of the godly man. He won't take up a reproach against his friend. He won't hear of it.

We use our palm in two ways, to apply it here, one, we put it over our own mouth so that we guard our mouth and preserve our own life, Proverbs 13:3 says, and then we use it as a stop sign to someone who brings it to us, and just mark out a circle of godliness in communication that surrounds us. Proverbs 13:3 says the one who guards his life preserves his life, the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. Some of us are more verbal than others, those of us that are verbal in our nature, we need to understand that we've got to be on guard about what's flowing out of our tongues because the righteous man guards that. His communication is part of what he watches so that he can have full communion, intimate association with the holy God of the universe so that when we ask the overarching question of the series that we're about to bring a close to, how can I be righteous here, well, after you search your heart you consider, you know, what's coming out of my mouth. And to just say this as well, beloved: there's more to deception than an outright verbal misleading statement. Deception is also found, isn't it, in withholding the truth, speaking less than the truth, speaking less than what is necessary to bring the fullness of what needs to be said in a relationship to be said. So we've just got to look at this from different angles.

Now this stuff, these things search us. In the language of my elderly friend back in California, Francis Greg, "I understand I'm meddling here." I'm meddling with life here but it's only because that's what the word of God does. The word of God is meddling with all of us here tonight and searching us out in our character and in our communication. Well, point number 3, David moves on to consider your companions. Your companions. A righteous heart has righteous loyalties. A righteous heart has righteous loyalties. Verse 4,

4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD;

The righteous man is someone who does not find comfort and comfortable friendship with those who reject Scripture and reject the Savior. I understand we evangelize, I understand that we speak in, we show kindness to strangers, I get all of that but what we're talking about here is who is it that has access to our loyalties, our inner affections, who is it that we find comfort in aligning ourselves with? The man who is perfectly comfortable with rebellious, hard-hearted sinners needs to rethink life. Stated in another

direction, the man, the woman, who does not find comfort in the presence of the people of God needs to rethink life because like is attracted to like in the spiritual realm. Those with godly desires find their home with others who share like godly desires. And so the godly man has no time for those who reject utterly the counsel of the Lord. He is not tempted by ungodly fame or ungodly fortune or finding prominence and prosperity in a crooked way. He doesn't want anything to do with it, would rather live in the corner of a roof than to live in a palace with ill-gotten gains. He's like the man described in Psalm 1:1, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!" The opening verse of the entire Psalter is built on this principle. The blessed man, the godly man is one who does not find his way of thought, his way of life, and his most comfortable friends with wicked people who have nothing to do with the word of God or the Son of God. He rejects it. He refuses it.

By contrast what he does, he follows the example of godly men. He defends them. Look at it there in the middle of verse 4. Some of you are like this and I thank God for you. Who is it that has fellowship with God? It's the one who honors those who fear the Lord. He honors those who fear the Lord. He follows the example of godly men, either those who have gone before in church history, or the godly men that are around him in life now. He follows their example. Paul said, "Be imitators of me. Follow my example." There is this aspect of Christian living where we look to those who are ahead of us in the race, we see the path that they followed and we walk in the groove that they established, we drive in the groove of the track that they've established, we follow in their wake. And I thank God for the men who've gone before me who shaped my life and established such a high standard that I fall so desperately short of. Men in Bloomington, Indiana, and in Chicago, Illinois, and in Sun Valley, California. I love them and I'm a debtor to them. You see, the godly man views life from that perspective. He thinks about the people, the men that have led in Christian faith. He says, "That's what I want to be like."

So he defends them. Let me ask you: how do you respond when someone privately criticizes a godly man to you? Do you take it up? Do you drink it in? Do you want to be quick to believe a bad report? Scripture is clear that in the church that's not to be done. Don't receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. There are those, at least in other churches, I won't say here, I'm not aware of it here, but there are those who are just quick, quick to want to believe the worst about godly men. Well, how do you respond when that comes to you? Let me give you a clue about living life in this area that I think is very helpful to understand. 99% of the people when they receive a report like that think this way, they think that the character of the godly man is on trial before them based on the report that is being given to them. That's the completely wrong way to think in situations like that. When this comes to you, you need to understand it's not the character of the godly man that's on trial, that's being tested by your ear, what's being tested is your character in how you respond to that. The godly man honors those who fear the Lord and the question is do you defend those godly men or do you stay quiet? Do you speak up and say, "That can't be true. That can't be true, why are you saying that?" You see, how you respond in situations like that is a measure of your own righteousness. A righteous man despises the gossip. The righteous man, the

righteous woman honors those who fear the Lord. It's transforming in the way that you think about things.

So your conversation, your companions are a revelation of your own righteousness. They say you can know a man by the company he keeps, right? Well, this is biblical. Let's go, fourthly, and just take a look at your commitments. There's more to be found in verse 4. You see something about the commitments of a godly man in verse 4,

4 ...He sears to his own hurt and does not change.

The righteous man, I'm just going to say this briefly, the righteous man keeps his word, keeps his promise even when it hurts. Circumstances may change since the promise was made but the godly man keeps his word even if it results in personal disadvantage, even if it doesn't work out like he had planned. Welcome to the realm of marriage where promises are made on the wedding day, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, and the question is when marriage, when life doesn't turn out the way that you had dreamed, what do you do then? The righteous man keeps his promise even to his own hurt. It applies in business dealings. Do you keep the contract? Do you honor your promise?

Now look, I understand and I want to be very sympathetic and compassionate in what I'm about to say here, I understand that for some of you, your spouse has literally made it impossible for you to keep the promises you wanted to. Your spouse left and that ain't right, and God understands that that departure was not of your own choosing and has sympathy and compassion upon you in that circumstance. What we're talking about here are situations that are within your control, where it is within your control to keep your promise and to not go back on it when the spouse suddenly gets sick with a lifelong illness, for example. The righteous man looks at that, the righteous woman looks at that and says, "I made a promise and I'm going to keep it. By the grace of God, I'm going to keep that promise. I'm going to embrace this circumstance as though this is what God has for me personally. I'm going to be thankful. I'm going to trust God for this and I am going to honor him to the best of my ability come what may." That's what a righteous man does. That's what a righteous woman does. You know, when you think about the conversations and companions and the commitments, you realize this is all intensely practical, isn't it? This goes to the very essence of day to day, moment to moment life.

Fifthly, finally, we've said that you consider your character, your communication, your companions, your commitments, point number 5, your cash. Your cash. David goes one step further in his practical assessment of this kind of righteousness and it's found in verse 5. This righteous man

5 ... does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

The godly man does not put personal gain ahead of his neighbor. Now listen, it is not wrong to make a profit in business. All David is saying here is that the godly do not take

advantage of the unfortunate. He doesn't abuse his position and take advantage for personal gain against those who are defenseless against his position.

And so with that, this brief Psalm, Psalm 15, has swept across major themes of life, it's swept across, there's not an aspect of your life that hasn't been touched by what we've said here. And going back to what we opened with, you see the genius of the Psalm. David didn't have to talk about every other thing, the things that he chose to speak about enough leaves no area of our lives unexamined and that's the way that it is. The question how can I be righteous here searches every area of your heart and every area of your life to conform it to the holiness of God.

What's the outcome of this? What is the conclusion? We see the conclusion there at the end of verse 5 when David says,

5 ...He who does these things will never be shaken.

Elsewhere in Scripture it says the righteous are bold as a lion. This kind of righteousness that has a vertical focus on Christ and thanksgiving and trust toward him and in him, and that expresses itself in this horizontal way, this kind of life cultivates an inner confidence in the promises of God. "I see," the righteous man says to himself, "I see the goodness of God in Christ, I see the promises of God, I see His providential control, I've experienced His blessing in my own life. This is going to be the outcome of the totality of my existence, the fullness of life will live out in the blessing of God." That's what David said elsewhere in Psalm 23, "Surely," surely, "goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." When you understand who God is and what salvation is, you understand that you will live under his protection and fear of the future is gradually shriveled up in your life, and hope and confidence replace it instead.

Well, no doubt some of us are convicted by the things that we've heard tonight. Let me end on a note of mercy and promise from God if you're convicted. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper." Let me say that again because some of you need to hear it, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper." God will not allow it. God will forbid your prosperity if you are one hiding sin in your life. "But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Those of you convicted and sorrowful and feeling the weight of your sin, I offer you the promise of the mercy of Christ even as a Christian to understand he came to die for those sins. His blood cleanses us from all sin. He is a willing gracious forgiver of every sin of every kind. You can go and find compassion. "Lord, I am so sorry. I am so convicted. Please forgive me." And before the words are off of your tongue, Christ in essence is saying, "Of course I forgive you. That's why I came." What a wonderful place to find rest.

And let me also say this lest you think I've only got a negative perspective on this. Many of you in this room, many of you should be very encouraged by the things that we've said here tonight because this Psalm has described you, described you in your character, you in the consistency of your communication, you in the companions that you choose, you in

the way that you generously handle your money. All of those things. All I could say to you is to give glory to God for his work in your life and to excel still more, and as you do persevere in that closing promise. Look at it there with me at the end of verse 5. This is a promise for you, "He who does these things will never be shaken."

Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness to Your people. We realize that if any good thing has come out of our lives, it's only to be attributed to the Holy Spirit. We take responsibility for our sin, we confess it to You. We ask You to forgive and cleanse us and we pray that You would strengthen us by Your Spirit, that Your Spirit would strengthen us in our affections to thank You, to trust You, and to pursue this holy life that marks those who dwell on Your holy hill. And so, dear Christ, how we love You, how grateful we are for Your shed blood at Calvary, that atoning blood that takes away all of our sin. We thank You for that and we pray that You would take our lives and use them greatly for Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray as we ask You to make us righteous right here, right now. Amen.

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