

Psalm 14-15 “The Two Paths”
Psalm 14
Ephesians 4:17-32

February 7, 2016

Some of the early Fathers saw a close connection between Psalms 14-15.

Theodore of Mopsuestia suggested that because Psalm 14 ends on a passive note,
as Israel waits for the LORD to save them from their enemies,
Psalm 15 was placed back-to-back with Psalm 14
in order to show the way of righteousness,
and encourage the people of God to “please God by upright behavior.” (175)

His friend, Theodoret spoke of how Psalm 14 prophesies salvation
and return from exile for Jerusalem,
and then Psalm 15 speaks of how the people of God are to live when God restores them.

Certainly when you look at Psalms 14-15 side by side
you see the path of fools and the path of the righteous clearly contrasted!

Sing Psalm 14
Read Ephesians 4:17-32

You might think that we would read Romans 3.
Romans 3, after all, is where Paul quotes Psalm 14.
Paul knows full well that Psalm 14 is talking about the Gentiles.
His point in Romans 3 is simply that Jews are no better than Gentiles!
Jews and Gentiles are alike under sin.

The reason why I wanted to read Ephesians 4 here
is because in Ephesians 4, Paul is making the same sort of contrast
between the fool and the righteous that we find in Psalms 14 and 15.

Yes, it is true that *apart from Christ* there is no difference between Jew and Gentile!
Apart from Christ we are *all* dead in our sins.
But Paul says that *in Christ* you are no longer a Jew *or* a Gentile.
“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.
They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God
because of the ignorance that is in them,
due to their hardness of heart.”

That is *exactly* the point of Psalm 14.

1. They All Have Turned Aside: The Path of the Fool (Psalm 14)
To the choirmaster. Of David.

So who is the “fool” of Psalm 14?

a. The Fool and the Sons of Adam: None Seeks After God (v1-3)

14 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

*They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,
there is none who does good.*

David is not talking about God's people.

He is talking about those who are alienated from the life of God.

In one sense, everyone knows that God exists.

So when the fool says in his heart "there is no God"

that does not mean that he is an atheist.

The point of saying "there is no God"

is that they believe that they can do "abominable deeds"
and get away with it.

*2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand,[a]
who seek after God.*

Are there any among the nations who seek after God?

Are there any who understand?

Are there any who act wisely?

The Psalmist says No.

*3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one.*

Humanity has turned aside from God's path.

The children of Adam all partake of Adam's corruption.

Sin has contaminated the human race.

And this corruption has spread to every part of the human person.

His heart – his inner thought and reasoning is corrupt.

His deeds are vile – and his understanding turns away from God.

This is what we mean by "total depravity."

Not that everyone is as bad as they could possibly be -

but rather that sin has corrupted every one of us, and every part of us.

And this is also related to what we mean by "original sin" -

that the corruption of Adam's sin has spread to the whole human race.

And this is not just an individual problem – together they have become corrupt.

Certainly all individuals have sinned – corruption is universal in that sense.
That's why David says “there is none who does good – not even one.”

It's not just that individuals are sinful,
societies are sinful as well.
The nations are *not* characterized by justice and righteousness.

And you see this in verses 4-6,
as David speaks of how the evildoers cannot win in the end,
because the LORD is the refuge of the poor.

b. Evildoers Cannot Win in the End: The LORD Is the Refuge of the Poor (v4-6)

*4 Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread
and do not call upon the Lord?*

Again you see how the Psalmist speaks of this “knowledge problem” -
“Have they no knowledge?”

But notice where the knowledge problem comes from!
“they do not call upon the LORD.”

At the root of our knowledge problem is a worship problem.
You know how this works!
You *know* right from wrong – you *know* what you should do!
Why do you not do it?

Think about how Paul says this in Ephesians 4:
“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God
because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (4:18)

Our fundamental problem is a problem of *worship*.

What is it that matters most to you?
What is the thing that drives you – that motivates you to do what you do?
What gets you up in the morning?

That is your god.
That is what you worship.

God looks down from heaven,
and he sees people doing all sorts of things to each other.

And he describes it this way:
“they eat up my people as they eat bread”

In the ancient near east it was common to speak of “eating people” -
they are not talking about cannibalism,
but about slander and gossip.
We have a similar phrase in English: “back biting.”
If you say that someone was backbiting you,
everyone knows that they were saying nasty things behind your back.

When you speak evil of one another, you are using your mouth to bite and devour each other.
When you slander someone or gossip about them,
you are “eating them.”
Your words are consuming them.

If you have ever been on the receiving end of such language,
then you know how it feels.

Words devour.

But in verses 5-6, the Psalmist assures us that the evildoers cannot win.

*5 There they are in great terror,
for God is with the generation of the righteous.
6 You would shame the plans of the poor,
but[b] the Lord is his refuge.*

In verses 5-6 we see clearly that David does not include all humanity in the category of the fool.
The generation of the righteous – those who take refuge in the LORD –
are being devoured by the fools.

David also calls these “the poor.”
What does it mean to be poor?
We often think that the poor are those who lack stuff.
And if you think that poverty is about material possessions,
then the way to solve poverty is by helping people get stuff.

But notice how David describes the poor.
Speaking to the evildoers, he says:
“You would shame the plans of the poor”
Poverty is not fundamentally a problem of stuff.
Poverty is fundamentally a problem of power and honor.

The poor are helpless and ashamed.

Those of you who are students are generally living well below the poverty line,
but you are not *poor*.
You may not be able to afford much *stuff*,

but you have access to power and influence.
Even if your professor tries to derail your future,
you have recourse to others who can help make it right.

If you have access to power and influence,
then you will not be lacking in material resources for long!

So, yes, there is often a correlation between poverty and material lack.
(After all, if a poor man has stuff,
someone who is powerful will come along and take his stuff,
and there is nothing that the poor man can do about it!)

That is what David means by “you would shame the plans of the poor,
because the LORD is his refuge.”

It really should *not* say “but” - the word in Hebrew means either “for” or “because.”
The whole point of the Psalm is that the evildoers are fools
who do not believe that God will do anything about their evil deeds.
They shame the plans of the poor
because the poor takes refuge in the LORD -
and the fool says in his heart,
“He trusts in the LORD to protect him – ha!”
Now let's see whether God will do anything to save him!

That's what the Jews said to Jesus!
Because after all, while the “fool” of Psalm 14 is a Gentile,
it is entirely possible for an Israelite to be a fool!
All you have to do is act like a Gentile!
Pastor Jon has been showing us this from the book of Judges.
The problem in the book of Judges is that God's people keep acting like Gentiles!

Indeed, Paul writes to the largely Gentile church in Ephesus
and tells them that they may not walk “as the Gentiles do”!

c. And So We Long for Salvation to Come from Zion (v7)

*7 Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!
When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people,
let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.*

The language of verse 7 “restore the fortunes” is “return from exile” language.
“When the LORD returns the captivity of his people...”

We often think of “The Exile” as happening in AD 586
when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple,
but that was only the Great Exile.

In the same way you often hear people talk about “The Depression”
by which they mean the 1930s – after the stock market crash of 1929.
But there had been many economic depressions in American history –
1819, 1837, 1857, 1873 – all were called depressions during the 19th century.
The reason why we still call 1929 “The Depression”
is simply because it was the worst and last great depression.

In the same way we can easily forget that “The Exile”
was not the first time that God's people had experienced exile.

They had been slaves in Egypt.
They were frequently oppressed during the days of the Judges.

Blair and Mark have been showing us in Sunday School
how even in the reigns of David and Solomon
not all was glorious and righteous!
And throughout the centuries, Israel had certainly experienced plenty of captivity
long before the “great” captivity in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

And so we long for salvation to come out of Zion -
we long for the day when God will restore the fortunes of his people -
when God will make all things right!

But we don't want to live in exile.
We want to dwell on God's holy hill.
And that's why I wanted to include Psalm 15 in today's sermon.

2. Sojourning in God's Tent: The Path of the Just (Psalm 15)

A Psalm of David.

*15 O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?*

Because I don't want to be a fool!
I don't want to turn aside and become corrupt.
I want to learn the path of wisdom!

Notice where David starts.
He starts by asking the LORD!
He does not trust in his own wisdom.
He wants to hear what God says!

Who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
God's tent is the tabernacle (and later the temple).
The holy hill is Zion – which means more than just an earthly mountain.

Solomon had said that “heaven of heavens cannot contain you,
how much less this house that I have built.”

So dwelling on God's holy hill is not just a matter of living in the temple.
After all, there is a very easy answer to the question of who can enter the earthly temple!
You must be a priest!
You must be of the house of Aaron!

But plainly, David is not asking what does it take to be a priest (at least in an earthly sense!).
David is asking what does it take to dwell in God's heavenly presence.

What does it take to dwell on God's holy hill?
What do you have to do to sojourn in God's tent?

a. He Who Does What Is Right (v2a)

2 He who walks blamelessly and does what is right

Walk blamelessly and do what is right.

It means exactly what it sounds like!

How can you ascend the hill of the LORD?
How can you enter the holy of holies?
How can you dwell in the presence of a holy God?

Well, you would have to be holy!
You would have to walk blamelessly and do what is right.

God's standard is perfect righteousness.
He has never had a different standard.
Who can sojourn in God's tent?
Who can dwell on God's holy hill?

Only one who is perfectly righteous!

At this point you may be saying, well, that rules me out!
And indeed, this is why Paul quotes Psalm 14 in Romans 3!

There is a sense in which *only Jesus* is the righteous man of Psalm 15.
Only Jesus can dwell on God's holy hill!

But plainly, Psalm 15 is speaking to all Israel.
Psalm 15 is not saying that this can only be true of the Son of David!
Psalm 15 is saying that this should be true of *you* as well.

And indeed, this is also why we read Ephesians 4:17-32.

In Ephesians 4, Paul says that “you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do,
in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God
because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality,
greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

But that is not the way you learned Christ! -

assuming that you heard about him and were taught in him,
as the truth is in Jesus,

to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life
and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,

and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God
in true righteousness and holiness.”

Notice that Paul moves from the themes of Psalm 14

(the fool who rejects God and thus his deeds are vile)

to the themes of Psalm 15

(walking in true righteousness and holiness).

For Paul – as for David – the one who would dwell with God must do what is right.

Paul makes it clear in Romans 3 and Ephesians 2

that this salvation is entirely the work of God's grace!

(As David had said at the end of Psalm 14!)

If you would dwell with God, then you must become a new man.

You see, there are two things that God does in Jesus.

First, he forgives all your sins and reckons you as righteous in his sight -

God declares you righteous in Jesus -

he judged Jesus guilty because of your sin,

so that he might judge you innocent because of Jesus' righteousness.

And when you try to say, “But I'm not good enough,”

Jesus says, “But that's why I died!”

Because you're *not* good enough!

Judged by God's perfect and holy standard,

you are not good enough – I am not good enough!

That's why Jesus died!

But there is a second thing that God does in Jesus.

Second, he renews and remakes you from the inside out.

As Paul says in Ephesians 4:24,

“to put on the new self,

created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

You have died with Christ.
You are no longer who you once were!

The old man does not seek after God.
The old man does not understand.

You sometimes hear people say that the Christian is characterized by a struggle
between the old man and the new man.

But according to Paul, the old man is *dead*.
“I have been crucified with Christ,” Paul says in Galatians 2,
and it is no longer I who live.”

The old “I” is dead.
The truth, as it is in Jesus,
is that you put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life,
and is corrupt through deceitful desires,
and you are renewed in the spirit of your minds, and you put on the new self.

There is a definitive break with your old life.
You were buried with Christ through baptism into his death.
You have passed from death to life in Jesus.

And that, too, is why Jesus died.

Jesus died so that we might be *declared* righteous in our justification.
Jesus died so that we might be *made* righteous in our sanctification.

And therefore, the rest of Psalm 15 should more and more be reflected in our lives day-by-day.

Because the rest of Psalm 15 simply lays out what it means to “do what is right.”
In that way, Psalm 15 is primarily about our sanctification –
more and more living unto righteousness.

b. He Who Speaks Truth – in Heart and Tongue (v2b-3)

and speaks truth in his heart;
3 who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

Notice how the Psalmist insists that the truth starts in the heart:
“he speaks truth in his heart.”

If you are lying to yourself – if you are believing lies in your heart –
then your spoken words will also be lies.

How do you know when you are lying to yourself?
After all, the whole point of self-deception is that *you* are deceived!
Listen to those who love you!
Take them seriously if they tell you that they see you lying to yourself!

As Paul says in Ephesians 4:25,
“Therefore having put away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.”

We are to be characterized by *justice* in the way that we speak to one another –
and the way that we speak *about* one another.

And if you pass on someone else’s gossip and slander,
then you also share in their guilt!

Think about this on Facebook before you share somebody’s post!
Whether it’s social networking online or a group of friends chatting in the hall,
you must always think, “how can I love God and neighbor in this situation?”

But the beginning of verse 4 reminds us
that it is not enough simply to say nice things about everyone!

c. He Who Judges Rightly Between People (v4a)

*4 in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the Lord;*

Verse 3 would be easy to keep by itself!
All you have to do is keep your mouth shut!

But verse 4 insists that you judge *rightly* between the vile and those who fear the LORD.
Do you despise the vile?
I once met a man who had a dozen affairs (mostly with women)
before his 7th wedding anniversary.
He was only sorry that he had been caught.

It was *right* to despise him.

You can despise someone and still love them!
Indeed, the only way I *could* love him was to despise him.
He needed to see that his deeds were despicable!

Our judgment of others must not be based on their status in society.
If a man's deeds are vile,
it doesn't matter who he is – he could be running for president –
and you should still despise him.

And in the same way it could be the homeless bum on the street corner,
but if he fears the LORD, then you should honor him!

And how do you know if he fears the LORD?
He will demonstrate it by how he speaks the truth and does what is right!

That's why the end of v4 says,

d. He Who Keeps His Word (v4b)

who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

The righteous man keeps his word.

When you say that you will do something, you do it.
Sometimes you make a promise,
and then you discover that it will cost you more than you thought.
Well, if you are going to be faithful to your word,
then you will not change.

It may be appropriate to try to renegotiate based on the new circumstances,
but you gave your word.

The economic theme continues in verse 5:

e. He Who Uses Money to Love Others (v5a)

*5 who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.*

In Dt 23, God forbade Israel to charge interest to one another.

You could charge interest to foreigners – so charging interest is not inherently sinful –
but the point of the Law was that you should not try to take advantage of the poor.
After all, in the ancient world, the most common sort of loan
happened when someone was in need,
and they ask to borrow from you.
And God says that we should just loan the money freely
and not charge interest.

We're not talking about business loans here.

Rather, when it comes to helping the poor,
Christians should not charge interest to each other.

(Incidentally, the PCA practices this with the Five Million Fund,
by giving interest-free loans to new churches to build or buy buildings).

Jesus says that even with respect to our enemies, we should “lend,
expecting nothing in return” (Luke 6:35)

How do we use money?

David says that we should use our money to love and serve others.

And this is seen also in his comment about bribery.

“he does not take a bribe against the innocent.”

Scripture never condemns the one who *gives* a bribe in order to obtain justice.

Missionaries in corrupt societies

often find that they can only get things done if they pay the officials extra.

Theodore of Mopsuestia comments that in his own day (5th century Syria)

“a fair sentence is delivered by many only when palms are greased.” (p179)

But notice where the sin is:

“he does not take a bribe against the innocent.”

You must be incorruptible.

Do not allow wealth and power to buy you.

You must do what is right and just – no matter the cost.

Conclusion: He Who Does These Things Shall Never Be Moved (v5b)

He who does these things shall never be moved.

In other words, he will dwell in God's tent forever!

I want you to see the contrast between the path of the fool –
and the path of the righteous.

The fool does not seek after God.

The fool devours people with his words.

The fool is corrupt and does abominable things.

The fool would use power and influence to shame the poor.

On the other hand,

the righteous worships at God's holy hill – and stays there because he does what is right!

The righteous speaks truth in his heart –

and therefore uses words to bless those who fear the LORD,
as well as to despise the vile!

The righteous is incorruptible –

and uses his power and wealth to help the innocent.

And Jesus died to do two things:

first, to pay the penalty for the fact that we have been too much like the fool;
and second, to change us from the fool into the righteous.