

Abiding in God's Presence

Text: Psalm 15:1-5

Introduction:

1. The Author of the Psalm: David is cited as the author. Some have called this "David's sermon on the Mount".
2. The Structure of the Psalm: The Psalm divides into two main sections:
 - Vs. 1 poses a question and thus introduces the theme.
 - Vs. 2-5 answers that question.
 - A summary expository idea would be: "In order to have communion with the LORD, we must live blameless and righteous lives (and if we have not, we must confess our sins before attempting to have fellowship with him). (Allen P. Ross)
3. Occasion: No specifics are given concerning the occasion of writing. However, this Psalm contains similar themes to Psalm 24 so it may have been penned at the time when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12-17).
4. There is a striking contrast to be noted with the previous Psalm (Psalm 14). Psalm 14 describes the unrighteous man; Psalm 15 describes the righteous man. In fact, the only One who truly fulfills the righteous demands of Psalm 15 is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, it has a good practical challenge to believers who desire to walk in close fellowship with their God.
5. We will study the Psalm under three headings with our primary focus being on the second point which deals with the answer to the question of the first verse and makes up the majority of the Psalm.

I. THE QUESTION CONCERNING ABIDING IN GOD'S PRESENCE (VS. 1)

A. The Person to whom the Question is Asked (Vs. 1a)

1. David addresses this question to Jehovah God. This is the right order as only God can set the terms for how He is to be approached.
2. This question is one on the heart of multitudes. How can we as sinners dwell with the Almighty, Holy God. Of ourselves in our sinful state, we cannot! We must be made righteous through salvation. The qualifications that follow point us to the need for salvation in order to qualify to be in God's presence. After salvation, it also has a practical outworking in our lives.

B. The Particulars of what is Asked (Vs. 1b)

The Psalmist poses two questions. Both contain a similar sentiment.

1. Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? The 'tabernacle' here is a clear reference to the tent in which the ark of covenant was housed at this time (2 Sam. 6:17). The temple was built later under Solomon.
2. Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? The reference here is to Zion. We know this from the first reference to God's holy hill in Psalm 2:6. The higher reference is to heaven, Jerusalem which is above. The only people who will dwell with God above are those who have been made righteous in Christ.

II. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ABIDING IN GOD'S PRESENCE (Vs. 2-5a)

"The Lord in answer to the question informs us by His Holy Spirit of the character of the man who alone can dwell in his holy hill. In perfection this holiness is found only in the Man of Sorrows, but in a measure, it is wrought in all his people by the Holy Ghost." A life of close fellowship with God requires:

A. A Blameless Walk – "he that walketh uprightly".

1. The word means "perfect, entire". Interestingly, the same Hebrew word is translated "without blemish" and "without spot" multiple times in connection to the sacrifices. The only One who truly walked on this earth "without blemish" was the pure Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:19 "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Through salvation we are cleansed by Christ's blood and clothed in Christ's righteousness so that we can stand before God unblemished in our position.
2. The English word captures the sense of the Hebrew well. The word 'uprightly' means "erect" and in reference to character it speaks of honesty and integrity. Now that we are saved, God desires us to have a blameless, holy walk. 1 Peter 1:15-16 "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."
3. God abundantly blesses and rewards those who walk uprightly! Psalm 84:11 "For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that **walk uprightly**."

B. A Godly Life – "and worketh righteousness"

1. The word 'worketh' means "to do". It refers to living right; someone who is walking in practical holiness.
2. The word 'righteousness' refers to what is morally and ethically right according to the standard of God. (Ross)
3. This is one of the fruits of salvation. We are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:10) and those good works are produced through us by the power of God working in us (John 15:1-8). His faith shows itself by good works, and therefore is no dead faith. "God's house is a hive for workers, not a nest for drones." (Spurgeon)

C. A Pure Thought life – "and speaketh the truth in his heart"

A godly person speaks the truth:

1. To others (Col. 3:9).
2. To himself. This is what is in view here. In the previous Psalm, the fool spoke falsely in his heart (Ps. 14:1). "What a contrast! True saints not only desire to love and speak truth with their lips, but they seek to be true within; they will not lie even in the closet of their hearts, for God is there to listen." (Spurgeon)
3. God desires truth in the inward parts. Psalm 51:6 "Behold, thou desirest truth **in the inward parts**: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom." If we don't carefully guard our minds, we can entertain a lot of lies inside our hearts and minds. God wants us guard our thoughts from evil and focus our thoughts on truth.
 - a. 2 Cor. 10:4-5 "(For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) **Casting down imaginations**, and every high thing that exalteth itself against

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the knowledge of God, **and bringing into captivity every thought** to the obedience of Christ;”

- b. Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, **think on these things.**”

D. A Bridled Tongue – “He that backbiteth not with his tongue...nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.”

1. He does not spread slander – “backbiteth not with his tongue”
 - a. Spurgeon writes, “Some men’s tongues bite more than their teeth”.
 - b. Interestingly the Hebrew word is most frequently translated “spies”, “spy out” and “to spy”. Also “slandered” & “search out”. So the backbiter is one “plays the spy” and is always on the hunt for a scandal. They are the gossip gatherers. The Bible warns against being a busybody. 1 Peter 4:15 “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a **busybody** in other men’s matters.” Some make it their business to know every one else’s business! Some are constantly pumping people for information. Learn to respect people’s privacy. See John 21:20-22 and Christ’s response to Peter’s question concerning John (“and what shall this man do?”) There is a saying “familiarity breeds contempt”. It means “that if you know a person or situation well, you can easily lose respect for that person or become careless in that situation.”
 - c. But the backbiter is more than just a talebearer. A backbiter uses his tongue to damage others. It is a graphic picture. We often use the expression “being stabbed in the back” but this is being bitten in the back and the sword is the tongue of the slanderer! This is more than idle gossip. The slanderer is out to damage the character of another. The motive is selfish and malicious. He works “behind someone’s back” because of his ungodly motive instead of coming and looking the individual in the face and dealing with the matter properly. Hence, the slanderer is also a coward.
 - d. James 3:2 reveals that the mark of a mature (perfect) Christian is their ability to bridle the tongue.
2. He does not entertain slander – “nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour”
 - a. The word “taketh up” means to lift, to bear, to carry. The word ‘reproach’ comes from the root word “to pull off, to expose by striping.” The thought introduced at the start of the verse is clearly continued. This is not the discussing of the true facts of a situation which is sometimes necessary but the work of tearing down someone else’s good character. Taking up a rumour and treating it as fact is wrong! Adam Clarke writes, “The application is easy: a man, for instance, of a good character is reported to have done something wrong: the tale is spread, and the slanderers and backbiters carry it about; and thus the man is stripped of his fair character, of his clothing of righteousness, truth, and honesty.”
 - b. Albert Barnes: “The idea is that of “taking up,” or receiving as true, or readily giving credit to it. He is slow to believe evil of another. He does

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not grasp at it greedily as if he had pleasure in it. He does not himself originate such a reproach, nor does he readily and cheerfully credit it when it is stated by others. If he is constrained to believe it, it is only because the evidence becomes so strong that he cannot resist it, and his believing it is contrary to all the desires of his heart. This is true religion every where; but this is contrary to the conduct of no small part of the world. There are large classes of persons to whom nothing is more acceptable than reproachful accusations of others, and who embrace no reports more readily than they do those which impute bad conduct or bad motives to them." (Albert Barnes)

- c. Be very careful about taking up someone else's offense against a brother or sister and making it your own. Ask yourself if it is really your role to get involved! Be careful about taking on someone else's **monkeys!** If a brother or sister begins sharing an offense they have against another brother or sister, instead of taking it on and becoming bitter on their behalf, encourage them to resolve it biblically in accordance with Matthew 18.
- d. Trapp says, that "the talebearer carrieth the devil in his tongue, and the tale-hearer carries the devil in his ear." (quoted by Spurgeon)

E. A Kind disposition – "nor doeth evil to his neighbour"

1. The godly person is kind and benevolent to others. He does not inflict harm upon others.
2. In this verse it certainly applies to the matter of slander. One of the vilest things you can do to another brother or sister is tear down their character through false accusation.

F. A Discerning Mindset – "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD."

A believer who walks closely with God exercises discernment and honours those who are truly worthy of honour.

1. He condemns the wicked – the word 'vile' speaks of a man who is a very wicked and depraved individual. The word 'contemned' means 'despised' and stands in contrast to the word 'honour'. The world's heroes are usually evil, wicked people. Think of it. Are the world's most famous people usually in reputation for holiness? The rock stars and movie stars are some of the vilest and yet they command the honour and admiration of millions, including people in high government office (e.g., presidents, prime ministers).
2. He honours the godly – for a godly person, those who fear the LORD are the ones worthy of respect. His heroes are holy people. Make godly people the object of your admiration and respect!
3. You can tell how much godly discernment a person possesses or lacks by observing the kind of people they highly esteem and honour. It says a lot about their character. Are their heroes wicked people or godly people?
4. Note: This The attitude required by God Almighty goes completely against the "judge not" philosophy in modern Christendom. A godly person should have a sharp and clear perspective on sin. 1 Cor. 2:15 "But **he that is spiritual judgeth all things**, yet he himself is judged of no man."

G. A Trustworthy Reputation – "*He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.*"

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1. To “swear” is to make a solemn oath. E.g., “do you swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth”. It speaks of a person whose word can be trusted.
2. This person will honour his word even if it comes at a personal cost. Some people’s word is dependent upon circumstances.
3. “Here the psalmist is dealing with faithfulness, keeping one’s word, even if it proves costly or inconvenient. The righteous must not change their mind to avoid an unexpected painful outcome; they must keep their word even if it means they suffer loss of some kind.” (Ross)

H. An Honesty in financial dealings – “*He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.*”

A godly person will not take advantage of others for financial gain. Two examples are given:

1. Putting money out to usury. The word ‘usury’ means ‘interest’. The Hebrew word comes from the root word “to bite” so it literally means “he does not lend out his money with a bite.” This is not a total ban on all forms of interest but specifically on exploiting people in need. The law was crystal clear on this point.
 - a. Deuteronomy 23:20 “Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother **thou shalt not lend upon usury**: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.”
 - b. Leviticus 25:35-37 “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: *yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner*; that he may live with thee. Take thou **no usury** of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.”
 - c. Some people seize on the misfortune of others to further themselves financially. This stems from a covetous spirit. A godly person will see an opportunity to give rather than get when someone is in need.
 - d. Spurgeon writes, “that the lender should share with the borrower in gains made by his money is fitting and proper; but that the man of property should eat up the poor wretch who unfortunately obtained a loan of him is abominable. Those who grind poor tradesmen, needy widows, and such like, by charging them interest at intolerable rates, will find that their gold and their silver is cankered.”
2. Taking a bribe to pervert justice (See Ex. 23:7-8; Deut. 16:19). A godly person who walks closely with God will not seek to gain financial advantage through questionable means that involves the exploitation of others.

III. THE QUALITY OF ONE ABIDING IN GOD’S PRESENCE (VS. 5B)

Those who live the godly life described in these verses with God’s enabling know stability.

A. The Person who knows Stability – “he that **doeth** these things”

1. The promise applies to those who make these godly qualities a part of their lives with God’s grace and power. They put them into practice!
2. Are we seeking to live out practical holiness? Make these godly qualities a priority in your life.

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B. The Promise of Stability – “shall **never** be moved”

1. Notice the word ‘never’. This is a place of absolute stability.
2. The word ‘moved’ means “to waver”. Observe that this final phrase links back to the theme introduced in verse 1. In verse 1 the question is posed as to who will abide and dwell in God’s presence. The answer is those who live out the truths of verse 2-5.
3. The experience of a double minded man is the opposite. James 1:8 “A double minded man *is* **unstable** in all his ways.”

Conclusion: Are you pursuing a life of holiness by the power of God? How important is it to you to know close fellowship with God in your life?