

## On God's Hill

*Series on the Book of Psalms*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 15:1-5

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### **10<sup>th</sup> – Tenth Presbyterian Church**

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Sometimes it is irritating and exhausting, sometimes very encouraging, sometimes enlightening, but the fact is that human beings ask questions. We ask questions all the time. If you are a parent of a young child, sometimes you are just exhausted by the questions.

“Daddy, if God created all things, did God make telephone poles?”

How do you get from where you are to an answer to that question.

“Where does milk come from? Why does ice melt? Why do I have to go to bed? Why do I need a curfew? Why is sex before marriage wrong? Is there such a thing as a just war? What does the Bible mean when it says God is sovereign?”

Questions. And the more you listen to the questions the more you understand that insightful people are not just the people who have the right answers. Insightful people are the people who have the right questions, because you don't get to the right answers unless you have the right questions.

Psalm 15 asks the right question. It is a question that really does get to the heart of the identity of every human being. If you want to know who you are, if you want to know why you have been given breath, if you want to know what in the world your life is about, you need to ask this question.

It is a question that gets right to the heart of the creative and sovereign purpose of God. It is a question that in its own way summarizes the entire redemptive drama. It is embedded in this question.

You couldn't ask a better question than the one that is asked in Psalm 15. Let me read again for you.

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?  
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?  
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right

and speaks truth in his heart;  
who does not slander with his tongue  
and does no evil to his neighbor,  
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;  
in whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
but who honors those who fear the LORD;  
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;  
who does not put out his money at interest  
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things shall never be moved.<sup>1</sup>

It is couched in the language of Old Testament culture, but it is nonetheless the question of questions. Good possibility that Psalm 15 was penned by David as he returned the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem, placed it in the tent on Mount Zion. A good possibility that this psalm was written as a liturgy that people would recite as they went up to worship.

It is amazing, this is probably true, that this was the psalm that Christ preached from on the Sermon on the Mount. There is almost a phrase by phrase, at points, similarity to that sermon, between that sermon and Psalm 15.

What does it mean to sojourn in God's tent? To dwell on his hill? Those are metaphors for being in the presence of God. Here is the question. Who has the right to live in the presence of God? That is the question. And when you hear that question it gets right to the heart of why you were created. This is not a luxury question. This is not some intellectual meandering and, oh, if we could just answer this question, but we don't really need to. This is the question of questions. You were made for relationship with God. You were given breath so that you could enjoy communion with him. It doesn't matter if you acknowledge it or not, the very nature of a human being is you were made for God, you were connected to God by the very nature of being given life and breath. Bottom line, that is what your life is about.

And so this question is: Who has the right to actually do what he was created to do?

And the answer is a crushing one.

You will not understand. You do not understand what Psalm 15 is about, brother and sisters, unless you are crushed by this answer. I want to tell you, my response to Psalm 15 this week was this psalm crushed me. I mean that because the answer is only a person who is purely righteous in every way has the right to be a guest in God's house. Only a person who is perfectly holy has a right to live in the presence of God. And when you hear that answer and you scan your week you say, "Not me, not me."

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 15:1-5.

And as the poetry of the Psalms often does, it just poetically laps layer and layer of what it means to be that perfect person on us until you are actually crushed by how far away you are from the standard of Psalm 15.

I would love to be able to stand before you and say this psalm is the testimony of my last week. But, brothers and sisters, I cannot do that.

Look at the content. Who is this righteous man? He is a man who is pure of heart. He is a man who loves his neighbor and every way. He is a man of unshakable moral commitment. He is a person who is upright in every one of his dealings and because of that he can't be moved.

Look at verse two with me.

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?  
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right  
and speaks truth in his heart.<sup>2</sup>

That last phrase is so provocative, speaks the truth in his heart.

Listen, you are in a constant conversation with you. Your heart never stops talking and your heart is always conversing about something, always has a viewpoint on everything, always is full of some kind of content. A righteous man's heart is absolutely filled with truth. His internal conversation is dyed by the truth of God. He only thinks what is right. He only desires what is right. He only purposes what is right. And when you read this you are confronted with this biblical theology of the heart. Listen, when the Bible talks about heart it is talking about the causal core of personhood. It is talking about the motivational core of who you are. It is talking about the directional system of your life and what the Bible says is what rules your heart, rules your words and rules your behavior.

And you cannot say, "I do x, y and z because of the things around me."

No, you do x, y and z because of how your heart reacts to what is around you.

Listen. Righteousness always begins with the heart.

Husbands, don't say it is your wives. Wives, don't say it is your husbands. Children, don't say it is your parents. Friends, don't say it is your friends. Workers, don't say it is your boss. Citizens don't say it is your governmental leaders. The Bible drives us again and again to our hearts. And the question who or what owns your heart, what owns your heart?

And what was crushing to me this week is the realization that there is still a war being fought on the turf of my heart. I don't always want what God wants. There are times

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 15:1-2.

when I think my way is better. There are times when there are things other than what God calls me to that appear to me to be more attractive and more beautiful.

Listen. The heart of your difficulty and mine is the heart. If that is not enough verse three says, “Who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”<sup>3</sup>

This person whose heart is ruled by God, because his heart is ruled by God, would never speak ill against someone, would never ever do anything that God would say is evil to his neighbor. Oh, my goodness. No act of selfishness, no moment of impatience and irritation, no lashing out with unkind words, no moment of bitter judgment, no pushing myself to the center of attention because I want to be in the center, no closing my eyes to the need of another because I am too busy taking care of myself. No playing again what people have said and done to me because the greatest offense in my life are offenses against me. No ever taking up a reproach of against a friend.

The word “reproach” there is an interesting word. It is rooted in a Hebrew verb that means to strip. It means I would never do anything that would strip a person of their reputation in any way, a powerful metaphor of what gossip does. Gossip strips a person of the reputation for the sheer purpose of the scintillating delight of carrying a tale.

I thought about these words this week and I thought, love your enemies? Love your enemies?” I don’t think that I love the people that I say I love. I don’t have time to. I am too busy loving me.

As a man of unshakable, a person of unshakable moral commitment, look at verse four. “In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD.” This person is so deep in his moral allegiance to God that he is reviled, revolted, turned away by sin as much as his Lord is. Sin is not attractive to him. It is not seductive. It is not magnetic. He wants to be with people who are moral because he loves the call of God to righteousness.

I don’t want to be legalistic with you this evening, but I think as your pastor it is my call to be honest. What did you feed yourself with this week? As you watched television, as you went to a movie, as you were on the internet, as you read a magazine, as you listened to music did you find entertaining, alluring, attractive things that your Lord names as vile?

Maybe, brothers and sisters, we are losing our edge. Maybe we are all too willing to expose ourselves in some form of fairly continuous diet to things that are dangerous and polluted, that dull your moral sensitivity, that are presented in ways that are seductive and attractive, wrapped in a gripping drama or an attractive song, but that take your mind places that your mind should not go.

I would ask you this month: Did you find entertaining something that God says is evil?

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 15:3.

This person also is a person who is absolutely faithful to his word, whose business dealings, if you would, are always upright, always trustworthy, driven by motives that are pure who swears to his own hurt and does not change. Here is what that means.

When this person makes a promise he or she is good to that promise even if delivery of that promise causes sacrifice and personal pain. This person doesn't say, "I didn't know it was going to be that costly. If you could please forgive me I am just not going to be able to deliver." Having promised, this person will do what he has promised, does not put out his money at interest that is usury is the word there. It is looking to get an advantage. It is looking to get a financial edge and I am willing to charge an exorbitant interest at the disadvantage of somebody else so I can gain an edge, so I can be prosperous.

Or a person who is unwilling to be bought, unwilling to take a bribe in order to gain for himself from the person who he is harming is innocent. He who does these things will never be moved.

Now I would ask you this evening: If you are currently achieving this standard, please stand? Look around.

Listen. Are you hearing me? That is not ok. That is not ok. And in that way this psalm is intended by God to crush you because actually this psalm is meant to be a psalm of comfort. But the comfort is only for those who are first crushed because this psalm is a psalm of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The he in this psalm is Jesus. This psalm point its finger at the Messiah who was to come. He was absolutely pure of heart. His heart never discussed anything but God's truth. He was loving to his neighbor in every way. He was unshakably committed to what was right. He made a promise that he would not turn from that cost his death. He could not be bought even though in the beginning of his ministry he was offered the kingdoms of earth. He would not take the bribe.

You can't really understand Psalm 15 unless you understand this psalm is meant to remind you that you and I will never achieve acceptance with God based on our own righteousness. This psalm calls you to abandon your righteousness. It echoes these amazing words from 2 Corinthians five, "For our sake God made him, Christ, to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>4</sup>

Christ is your righteousness. He lived on your behalf. Every moment of righteousness, every good choice, every rightly spoken word, every godly decision, every moment of righteous encounter that was lived by Christ as lived for you and for me. He was achieving the righteousness that we could not achieve on our own so that this evening you could run in your weakness and your failure and your sin and your struggle and your

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<sup>4</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:21.

rebellion to him and seek his help and be unafraid because your righteousness was purchased by Christ and your penalty has been borne on his back. Praise him.

You are only ever ok. You are only ever invited into the holy presence of God—are you listening to me?—when you abandon your own righteousness. Give it up. When you take off the righteousness that only can be found in the Lord Jesus Christ you do not have to run from God’s presence. You do not have to be afraid. You can come to him. The price has been paid.

But there is one other thing that I want to say to you. I think it is terribly important to say. The gospel is not just a comfort. Oh, it is that. But the gospel is a call.

I love the discussion of the gospel in Romans eight. Well, I love wherever the gospel is discussed, but I particularly love the discussion of the gospel in Romans eight because in Romans 8:1-11 Paul lays before us these two beautiful comforts of the gospel, the comfort of the removal of the sentence of condemnation. That removal of the sentence of condemnation is necessary because of the guilt of sin. And then Paul brings to our memory a second comfort of the gospel. That is in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is given because of the inability of sin. Sin leaves us guilty so Christ has carried our guilt and sin leaves us unable so the Spirit has been given.

And just about when you are celebrating the great comfort of the gospel you hit verse 12. And verse 12 says this in the NIV. “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it... but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”<sup>5</sup>

What Paul says is, “You cannot accept the comfort of the gospel without also accepting its call, its obligation.” The grace of the gospel obligates you.

The second chapter of Titus says that God’s grace has appeared to all men teaching us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passion and live a self controlled, godly and upright life.

What teaches us to say no? Not the law. Grace. Grace teaches you to say no. And so you cannot run after the comfort of the gospel without also running after its call. And you cannot ever embrace the call of the gospel without running after its comfort.

Some of you are living lives that are not pleasing to the Lord because you are dancing on the comfort and you have forgotten the call. Sorry. It is true. There are moments where I have to offend you.

Some of you are just defeated and your heads are in your chest because you are trying to live the call of the gospel and you have forgotten its comfort. And you do not look like you have met Jesus at all. And if your life is an expression of meeting Jesus there are

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:13-14.

people who probably won't be too excited about meeting Jesus because you look beaten up.

You see, both ends are dangerous. And this is the beautiful balance of the Word of God that this psalm that is a glorious comfort is also a call. This standard is not just an unrealistic standard that you can say, "Nobody could do that," and quit trying. Because what it says in Leviticus 20 and is repeated in 1 Peter chapter one is this. "Be ye holy as I the Lord your God am holy."<sup>6</sup>

How is it that God is holy? He is holy in everything he does.

Now hear me. This means that this completely unrealistic, exotically high standard is actually the moral standard by which you are called to live. By God's grace you have been called to quest for the impossible. And what is that call meant to do? It is meant to drive you away from your righteousness, away from your strength, away from your wisdom to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ because it is only there that you will find the forgiveness and the power to do what you have been called to do. That is the gospel.

And so every day you are to quest for this standard. Every day you should say, "This is how I want to live. I must not and will say it is too high. I want to be this type of person. Oh, Lord, forgive me for yesterday for not being this type and help me today to take another step toward this standard."

And every day you should pray that and you should look back in two years, in five years, in 10 years and you have moved further along the path to this standard by the grace and the power of God.

We need the balance of the comfort and the call of the gospel. We can be people of such low standards. We can so easily take ourselves off the hook.

And Psalm 15 meets you with comfort. If you are God's child you do not have to be afraid of him. Your righteousness has been accomplished. Your penalty has been covered. Praise God.

But you must not receive that comfort in a spirit of self absorbed laziness. You must say, "I have been called to be holy and I will work and study and pray and fellowship and consume the means of grace until I have been formed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, Lord, please help me."

And the promise is when you live that way you will not be moved. You want stability in your life? You want to get free of being beaten about by every relationship that doesn't work, every dream that isn't fulfilled, every conversation that hurts you, where you ride the emotional roller coaster of the circumstances of life? You want stability? You put one foot on the comfort of the gospel and you put one foot on the call of the gospel, you

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<sup>6</sup> See Leviticus 20:7, 1 Peter 1:16.

will have a life of remarkable stability because you are actually placing your feet on the solid rock.

And the name of that rock is Jesus.

On Christ the solid rock I stand.  
All other ground is sinking sand.

Let's pray.

*Thank you, Lord, for the powerful balance of the truths of your Word. Thank you that these poetic words written at this dramatic moment when your ark is brought back to Jerusalem, thank you that these words are thousands of years later, words of sweet comfort and words of moral call. May we stand with one foot on comfort and one foot in the call and realize when we do that we are standing on the rock Christ Jesus. In his glorious name we would pray. Amen.*