

Psalm 15 Matt Taylor 19th April

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Heather, thank you so much for reading God's Word this morning. If you've got your Bible open on page 549, that would be really helpful. I pray both to yourself and to me this morning We're going to be diving into Psalm 15. As Dave mentioned, it's a new series for us this morning. And we'll be looking at Psalm 15, both this morning and in our growth groups midweek as well. And to that end, there's a little box for you to fill in on the service outline. The question is quite small, isn't it? But it does say, what one thing were you struck by from the preaching of God's word? It's a question we'll put on every week as we look at it. ***What one thing has struck you from the preaching of God's word this morning?***

So as we dive into God's word, let me lead us in a prayer. Father, we do pray that you would teach us this morning, be our teacher. and please tell us true things about yourself. But also, Father, we ask that you would help us to see Jesus in all his glory and all his brilliance, that we would bow our knee before him as our King, that we would come into your presence through him. Father, please be at work in us by your Spirit to show us Christ. for your glory's sake. Amen.

Who is it that gets into the good place?

So you pass through death, you land at the afterlife, you're in the good place, not the bad place, who gets there? That's the premise of The Good Place, the Netflix sitcom, And the first episode opens with this question: Who is it who gets into the good place?

And, according to this drama, it is based on a moral accounting framework. Every action you do has a positive or a negative value. So across your life, if you end slavery, then you get 814,292.59 points. And if you support Man City,

then you lose 109.94 points. And across your life, your totals are added up. And if you're good enough, you get into the good place.

Who gets into the good place? Well, good people. So would you get in?

I wonder if we asked people today, would you go to the good place? What would people say? Well, I wonder whether most people would say, well, I'm no Mother Teresa, but I'm no Adolf Hitler. I hope to think I'll just scrape in. Just good enough.

There's a humble uncertainty built into this moral accounting framework. You see, you'd never admit that you are sure you'll get in because that would be arrogance and that would be a negative score on your copy book. But actually we think, maybe I'll just scrape in. When the great shakedown happens, when we die, will we go to the good place?

Let's move from sitcom to reality. Who is it who gets to heaven? Who is it who has a room in the Father's house? Who gets to live with God?

Now this is a question not just for the afterlife. Wonderfully, Jesus says that before we get to live with God in his new creation, God will come and live with us. In our own lives, he will make his home in us by his Spirit, John chapter 14, verse 23.

So who is it who gets to enjoy the good place of the presence of God? Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the whole triune God, who gets to enjoy his presence?

Well, if we've been at Trinity for a while, your answer will be those who have put their trust in Jesus. That's the head knowledge, isn't it? That's the head answer. I get into heaven because of him, his mercy, not my merits.

But I wonder whether we drink the water that we swim in. And so we think day by day I come to God's presence, not because of what Jesus has done, but what I do. So if I bring someone to Christ, well then I've got so many points. God is going to love me. If I join the heroes team, I'm going to have more points. And

yet, if I don't keep God's law, if I do evil to another, well then my score goes down.

And I wonder whether we see this day by day in our own lives, how confident we are we can enter into God's presence. A friend speaks to us of their peaceful, quiet times. Their new technique where they really feel the presence of the Lord. We just feel so dry and empty in our own lives, full of doubts and distance. We may look good on the outside, but on the inside, far from God. And we doubt whether we can come into his presence.

Maybe it is, we're just tuning in online this morning. because we couldn't even dare come into a church building this morning.

Psalms 15 to 24 are all about this question. Who is it who gets to enjoy the good place of God's presence? And Psalms 15 to 24 are a section of the Psalms, the Psalter.

And they have this repeated question, chapter 15, Psalm 15, verse 1, who may dwell in your sacred tent, who may live on your holy mountain, And if you flick over a few pages to Psalm 24, you see the same question is asked. Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?

And if you start to study these Psalms as a group, you'll see actually that there's a lot of repeated lines, that Psalm 16 parallels with 23, 17 with 22, 18 with 20 and 21, and Psalm 19 in the middle. And we'll see this structure built around to show us who is it that can dwell in God's place.

And we'll see that Psalms 15, 19 and 24 are very theoretical in language. But 16 to 18, 20 to 23 are earthed in David's experience, showing that this is a section answering this question, who is it that can enter into God's presence? Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

So we're confronted with the biggest of questions. And verse one, Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent. The question is then repeated, who may live on your holy mountain?

Now when you think of the Lord's holy mountain, where does your mind go? Well if you're Ezekiel, your mind goes back to Eden. Mount Eden, where God created the world and he placed Adam at the heart in his garden, where he enjoyed life with God in his place.

The Mount of God originally was Eden, the place of paradise. And if you know the Bible story, you'll know that Adam and Eve did not enjoy life with God for long. No, they listened to the serpent as he slithered in. And they fell from God's presence. And God put a cherubim with flaming swords to stop them getting back to the tree of life.

But this desire to get back to paradise, to get back to the presence of the Lord on his mountain, continues through the scriptures. And so as Exodus opens, Moses comes to the mountain of the Lord, Mount Horeb or Sinai as it's later known.

And in chapters 19 and 20 of Exodus, Moses ascends up the holy mountain of the Lord, but only he can go up. The people have to stay at the bottom of the mountain.

And in the later chapters of Exodus, there is described the tabernacle, or Psalm 15, verse 1, the sacred tent of the Lord. One commentator describes the tabernacle as an architectural mountain of the Lord.

If you know the details of it, you know they're a cherubim woven into the curtains of the tent. picturing that Genesis 3 image of going back to Eden, you can't come in because of those cherubim.

Who is it that can go in? Well, the high priest once a year can go through into God's room in his sacred tent.

But as the first, the Psalm was first read and sung, as David wrote it, where is the mountain of the Lord? Well, it is Zion. that mountain in Jerusalem with Solomon's temple, the kind of solid tabernacle built on God's mountain where God has installed his king.

God's king who would lead his people to live in God's place where they would have life and it would only be good all the time.

So the question this Psalm is asking is, who is it that can have life with God? And when the rubber hits the roads, that has got to be the biggest question, hasn't it?

How can we know true life with God? Who is it that gets to the Father's house, to the good place?

You see, the reality is that one in one of us will die. And after that, Wonderfully, we can know for sure that we can be in the Father's place, not because of our merits, but because of what Jesus has done.

And if you're thinking things through, then that's why we put on this 3-2-1 course, to investigate these things, to find answers to the biggest questions. Do come along, do find out more.

And Jesus said himself, what good is it to gain the whole world and yet forfeit your soul? Come and think these things through the biggest of questions.

But the Psalm continues with the most searching of answers in verses 2 to 5. what we get here is a pen portrait of a person. Who is it that can live and can dwell in God's presence?

And what's striking is it's not the person who scored the most points. No, it is the person whose way of life is blameless.

Hentry isn't based on birth or education. It's not based on class or celebrity status. It's not based on religious observance, the number of sacrifices you've offered, the tithes you've given. And nor is it based on a religious experience, as though you've been there with Moses at the burning bush.

Now what is it based on? It is based on character. The one whose way of life is blameless, a perfect character.

And firstly we see in verses 2 to 3, what they do reveals their character. So they do what is righteous, verse 2. But what is right, just and fair. Those are the

things that drive their actions. What drives what they do is not happiness or self-fulfilment, but it is what is right, just and fair.

More than that, verse 3, they do no wrong to a neighbour. They don't do wicked and evil things to other people. What they do reveals their character.

But also what they say reveals their character. Again, look to verse 2. They speak truth from their heart. Do you note that tone of authenticity here? What you see is what you get.

What they say comes from their hearts. There's no two-facedness in them, believing one thing and saying another just to keep people happy. They speak from their heart. But also notice, what they speak is not their truth, but the truth.

The sure, trustworthy reliability of God's revealed will in his world.

And also verse 3, their tongue utters no slander, they cast no slur on others. They don't spread damaging gossip, speaking ill of other people. No, they don't look down on others, casting a slur upon them.

They may see sin in other people, but they recognise their own inclination to evil. And so instead of responding with judgment, casting a slur on them, they will respond with compassion.

See, what they say reveals their character. But thirdly also, how they respond to others reveals their character to you. Have a look with me to verse and four. They despise a vile person, but honour those who fear the Lord.

Commentator Derek Kidner says, this is about who you give your vote to.

So I want to take you to the school playground. Who is it that the kids admire in the school playground? It's the cool person, isn't it? And who is the cool person? so often those who push the limits of God's rule with drink, sex and drugs, many other various ways going contrary to God's way.

They're the people who are admired by their contemporaries. And who is it who's despised? Well, I wonder whether it's the God squad. Throughout

history, Christians have been labelled with these terms, whether it's the Methodists for their methodological way of studying the scriptures, or it's the Puritans with their puritanical ways. They're the ones who are despised.

But not so the one in God's presence. No, they despise the vile person, the one who goes against God's ways, and honour those who fear the Lord, who they cast their vote for. reveals their character.

But also their promises in the end of verse 4. For they keep an oath even when it hurts and does not change their mind.

We live, don't we, in a FOMO culture, the fear of missing out. And so often we can, for the fear of missing out, we can change our mind. We can pull out, we can break our promises. because we fear we will miss out on other things. Yet this person, the one who dwells in God's holy mountain, who dwells in God's tent, their word is their bond. Even if they do miss out and it costs them, they keep their oath.

And then we move to money in verse 5. when this person sees a poor person, they don't see them as a means to making a quick buck out of a shark loan. No, they will lend money to them, but without interest, not seeking to exploit them.

And nor are they swayed when money comes to them when it comes to justice either. They won't accept a bribe against the innocents.

Here we have this outline of the kind of person God wants to live in his house. And if we step back and look at this person, imagine for a moment you were looking for a lodger to live in your house. And someone sent in this character reference. Would you want them to live with you?

I would. That's the kind of person I want to live in my house. Someone you can trust, who'll do right, who will speak truth from their heart, who won't slur you

and speak down to you. They'll keep their promises and they're good with finances too.

And God says, if you're like this person, well, my doors are open wide too. You can come and live in my house forever.

What wonderful news. This is the person who can live in God's house. And more than that, there's a wonderful promise. Dave's picked up on it already. At the end of verse 5, whoever does these things will never be shaken.

They have a permanent place in the Father's house, a room that has their name on it. They belong there. And who wouldn't want that? To live with God forever. Never evict it.

So here is assurance for you. If you live this perfect life, you will live with God forever. You can waltz into the new creation fully assured that you won't be kicked out.

So as we hear Psalm 15 this morning, how do we feel? Confident. Unnerved. Exposed.

Maybe we read it and we're scanning the text and think there must be a loophole here somewhere. Maybe there's, let's have a look. Verse 3. Who does no wrong to a neighbour? here we go. So, who is my neighbour? Maybe, who is my neighbour? What a question.

And then we think, actually, oh wait, someone tried that, didn't they, with Jesus. Some of the man rocking up to Jesus, he says, love your neighbour as yourself. And the man says, well, who is my neighbour? Who am I to know who I'm to love?

And Jesus tells that parable of the Good Samaritan, unearthing that the enemy by his side that is your neighbour.

You see, we can't squeeze out of this through a loophole. It is only the one who is perfect, in character, can dwell with God.

So how are we feeling? Confident, unnerved or exposed?

To be honest, I'm convicted by the wrong that I've done to a neighbour. You hear the cheap laugh? that I've kind of tried, the joke I've tried to make, that's actually dragged other people and other people through the mud, casting a slur upon them.

No, I voted with my feet to follow the cool guys and despising God's people. I've multiple times broken my promise to other people from my own ease, made money at other people's expense,

You see that outline? If you fill it in, you don't get Matt Taylor. And therefore I cannot go into God's presence. I can't dwell with him. I need to be shut out from God's presence forever.

But here's the good news. If you were to ask an average Joe Israelite as this psalm was sung, Who can go into God's tent? Well, the answer to them would have been obvious. And it was never them. It was the high priest.

It's a bit like today. If I was to ask you, who is it that can go into an aeroplane's cockpit? And your answer will be straight away... The pilot. There we go, Colin. There we go. I did check out that this was actually right. It's basically true. And apart from, apparently the cabin crew can come in to give you coffee as well, but only if the pilot lets them in.

So you can only go into the cockpit if you're the pilot, if you can only go into God's holy place, the temple, the tabernacle, if you're the high priest.

And actually, if you think about it, the high priest going in would have been shaky. It wouldn't have been an unshakable entrance into God's presence. And also they could only go in one day a year after a lot of shedding of blood. They wouldn't have dwelt in God's sacred tent. They wouldn't have lived on God's holy mountain.

So who is it that can enter into the mountain of the Lord? Psalm 15, if you noticed, is a psalm of David. And David is the king of God's people, God's chosen king.

Psalm 2, verse 6, we referenced it earlier on, says this. God says, I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill.

See, God's king was to lead his people into holiness. And if we live in Israel, if our king does what is good and right, then we have life in God's presence in his land and all his goods. And yet, if our king does what is evil in God's eyes, when life goes bad for us as his people, you see, the life of God's people is tied up with their king, leading them back into the presence of God.

So as David pens this, will he be the king to lead God's people into his presence? Well, if you know the story of David, you'll know it's not him. He did evil to his neighbour. Think of the story of Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. David doesn't qualify to live in God's sacred tent. to live on his holy mountain.

See, as the people sang this psalm for the first time, they were looking forward, they were longing for a priest, for a king who would bring them to the Father's house.

So do we see that this pen portrait can only ever be filled by the Lord Jesus Christ himself?

The one who lived that blameless life. The only one who ever did what was right all the time and spoke God's truth, actually who was the truth. The one who related to people with perfection. He spoke no slander, did no wrong, honoured the weakest who feared the Lord.

Just think about the woman who dropped those two coins into the temple treasury, honouring her when all others passed her by.

He kept the eternal promise to save God's people even at the cost of his own life. And instead of taking reward against the innocent, no, he was sold for 30 pieces of silver for us the guilty.

You see, Jesus is our high priest. He is our king. He is the one who shed his own blood and ascended into heaven the reality that is the mountain of the Lord. Not by the blood of animals, but through his own blood shed on the cross. And as he ascended into heaven, he has obtained for us an eternal redemption, an unshakable access to the Father, that if we place our trust in him, we're united to him, that we're in him, and so we have access to the Father now.

So Paul can write to the Ephesians, we have access to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

So brothers and sisters this morning, do you know that you have access to the Father, not based on what you've done, not based on your religious observances, not based on experience you've had, but 100% based on Jesus?

So don't hold back from going to that throne of grace. Come to the Father's throne through Jesus this week. However messed up your life is, you can come. However perfect your life is, you can come.

And what's wonderful about the Father making his home in us, and the Son making his home in us by the Spirit, is that God promises to change us, to make us more like Jesus, transforming us to be more like our King.

And therefore, bit by bit, our lives become a little bit more blameless in what we do. and say and how we relate to one another. That is the lives we're aiming for as followers of the Lord Jesus, as subjects of our King.

To do what is righteous, to not do wrong to a neighbour. To speak God's truth from our hearts, not to slander others or curse a slur on them. To relate to people rightly, both in our promises and with our money.

As individuals, our characters will be changed. but also as a community of his people, our culture will be changed. That we do say and relate in the way of our King.

So as we come to a close, who is it that can come into God's presence? The answer is, you can. Not through your merits, but through his mercy.

Because Jesus is the one who has died to forgive your sins. And he is the one who has ascended into heaven. He is seated there at the right hand of the Father right now, that we might know his presence in our lives, both now and for eternity.

Let me lead us in a prayer. Jesus, we praise you and thank you that you are our righteous King, that you are the one the Father has installed in heaven, the one who shepherds his people. Please, would you change us and conform us to your likeness, we pray.

Help us to be changed bit by bit into your character. Please, would you make us worthy of the calling with which you have called us? Would you change the way in which we do things? Would you change the way in which we speak? Would you change the way in which we relate to other people, that we would be more like you for your glory's sake? Amen.