

Psalm 15 - Rest in peace

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Preacher: Seth Campbell

[0 : 00] Turn to Psalm 15. I'm going to read it and then I'm going to hand over to Seth. A Psalm of David. Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?

The one whose way of life is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart, whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor and casts no slur on others, who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps an oath even when it hurts and does not change their mind, who lends money to the poor without interest, who does not accept the bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken. Thank you for reading that, Steve. Psalm 15. So I want to start us off with a little bit of an English lesson. I know some of us just got really nervous, right, going all the way back to English class, but I want to start us off with not necessarily English but more literature, thinking about one of the greatest poets of all time, not William Shakespeare, but Homer. And see, Homer wrote this great epic called The Odyssey, right?

And The Odyssey was about this guy named Odysseus. He's the guy up there in the left-hand corner. And Odysseus had fought this 10-year war in Greece, no, against the Trojans, and he was fighting this war. It took on 10 years, and then Odysseus decided, I'm going to come up with one of the greatest scams in the history of the world. Maybe you've heard of it. It's called the Trojan horse. And he rolls this horse in. The Trojans think, oh, okay, the war is over. Great, they gave us a sacrifice. And then these guys come pouring out in the middle of the night, and the Greeks end up winning the war.

Odysseus then, after this war, what does he want to do? He's been away for 10 years. So he wants to go back home and experience rest, right? And so a journey that should have taken him about two months, so he was up here at one, this is his home, should have taken him about two months to get home, takes him 10 years to get home. And so this journey takes him on all kinds of adventures. He ends up talking to some mermaids. His crew gets turned into pigs on some aisle. He even goes all the way down to the underworld. But through all of this, the desire of him is to get back home. He wants to dwell with his wife. He wants to get back home to rest. And so finally, after 10 years, he's been gone for 20 years now. He finally gets back home. And instead of going, hey, I'm home. Welcome in. I want to see my wife. He decides to do something a little bit different. He puts on a disguise. And then they host this competition, right? Where they get this huge bow. That's it there. And Odysseus is the only one that can string this bow. And then not only does he string it, he shoots it through 12 axe heads. I don't know how that works. I'm not an archer, but he shoots it through 12 axe heads.

[3 : 24] And then everybody knows, oh yes, this is Odysseus. And so his wife had all of these bachelors that were wooing her, trying to get her to go over and marry them because Odysseus had a lot of land and a lot of wealth. And then all of a sudden, Odysseus shows back up and starts to scatter them all.

And what is really a pretty gruesome and bloody battle where he starts just killing everyone. But the desire of Odysseus throughout all of these travels, throughout 10 years of war, and then 10 years of travel, was that he wanted to get home.

He wanted to experience rest. I know some of the introverts in the room are like saying, me too, I get that. Today, in our passage, in Psalm 15, we're going to look at a similar traveler on a journey for rest.

But this traveler doesn't want to just see his wife like Odysseus did. He wants to dwell with the Lord. So in Psalm 15, we're going to see that the psalmist, or we'll call him the traveler today, is going to have three things. He's going to ask a question. He's going to find the answer to that question. And then he's going to consider the result. So three things that we're going to break this passage down

into. The first one is he asks a question. And it's important to remember the context here as we move through the passage. As the reader, we've been reading and going through the Psalms. And if you were doing that, you would see Psalm 10, Psalm 12, Psalm 13, all have to do with laments. Basically, the psalmist has been in this pit of despair. And then Psalm 14, if you were with us last month, Nick did a great job of unpacking that. The traveler that's in despair looks up and considers the fool all around them. And then he moves from considering the fool now into Psalm 15. And he's asking the question, who can dwell on the tent of the Lord? Who can live in the holy mountain of God?

See, this is the main desire of our traveler, of the person in Psalm 15. This is the inciting incident, if you will. This is the main task that the psalmist or the traveler here wants to accomplish. Just like any good story, there has to be a task to be accomplished, right?

[6 : 09] Indiana Jones wouldn't be a story unless he was trying to get the Ark of the Covenant. If there's any Disney fans in the room, Moana wouldn't, there wouldn't be a story there unless she was trying to save her island from dying. Odysseus, there wouldn't be a story there unless he wanted to get home. If he was just some freeloader floating through the ocean, he would have stayed at the island with the mermaids. But he had a desire to get somewhere. The psalmist, the traveler here, has a desire to get somewhere. And that desire is that they want to rest. They want to dwell with the Lord. Look at verse 1. It says, Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain? And you may be thinking to yourself, okay, Seth, that's great. That's not much of a thriller of a story. A traveler wants rest. Not breaking any new ground there. And I would say, yes, that's exactly right. This is not a new concept. In fact, this actually relates a lot to us today, right? How often do we go to work and put aside money?

We sweat and we toil and we don't use that money at the instant right now, but instead we put that aside for later for what? For a retirement so that we can experience rest at a later date. We are pursuing something now so that we can have rest later.

Same thing can be said for, if you think just a little bit closer, what do you want when you go through the craziest season of the year? Whether that for you may be at work, when it's if you're an accountant during tax season, maybe it's if you're a pastor during Easter, whatever it is, what do you want after you go through your craziest season? You want a holiday. And then to make this just really personal, what are you going to want when your alarm blares at 6 a.m. tomorrow morning, waking you up, trying to go to work. Well, you're going to want to roll over and hit that snooze button and get just a few more moments of rest before you go on. See, we all want rest. Our bodies crave it. The NHS spent 72 million pounds last year on insomnia medication alone. Our society wants to rest.

[8 : 46] And so when the opportunity presents itself to the traveler to have permanent rest, he is more than keen. He wants in. He wants to understand, how can I get this rest?

But the cost is going to be larger than he can fathom. So let's move on to the second point. See, Odysseus, going back to our main story, the cost of his rest was a 10-year journey. He had to go through a bunch of trials in order to get home. For the traveler, in our psalm here, the cost is going to be a perfect life. Are we familiar with the game Hangman?

Okay, good. I'm glad that this illustration is not going to fall flat, then, because that's kind of what the rest of the sermon is built on. We're going to use that illustration a bit to kind of go through and help see what the psalmist is talking about as we move through this psalm.

So at first, the psalmist asked the question, who can dwell on the holy mountain? And now, he's going to find the answer. Look at verse 2. Verse 2 says, So the first qualifications for those that are trying to enter the rest that only the Lord can provide is to be blameless. You have to live a blameless life.

Blameless, a simple definition, just means that you are innocent of wrongdoing. It means that you've never messed up, you've never lied, you've never stolen, you've never cheated.

[10 : 39] And if you look at the text, it gives a definition right behind it. It says, right after blameless, it says, the person that does what is right. And if we think about it, well, this is an obvious one, we really don't hit this standard. And this would be our first strike, or the head of the hangman.

So we move on now to the second point that says he speaks truth from their heart. Going back to point one, we understand that there is not a person that is blameless in the entire world, right? This point even furthers that a little bit more by saying there's actually not even anyone that has a pure heart. The prophet Jeremiah would say the heart is deceitful beyond cure. Basically, what he's

saying there is there is nothing pure that can come from the heart, because the heart itself is not pure.

And so there's no truth that can come from that. And once again, we fail this qualification for entering rest. So we'll give our hangman a body. You continue in verse three, it says, whose tongue utters no slander. This speaks of a truthful person. The pastor from New York, Tim Keller, he had a good point on this. He said, the Bible basically defines lying as a misrepresentation of truth. In other words, what this means is that there are no layers to truth.

Jesus, when he was talking on the Sermon on the Mount, kind of redefined truth for us a little bit. He said, do not swear by heaven. Do not swear by earth. Do not swear by the city of Jerusalem.

[12:28] Do not swear by your own head. Let your yes be yes. Let your no be no. He was saying you do not have to take an oath for these things. What does he mean by that? Does he mean when you go to court that as a Christian, you shouldn't take an oath to say the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

I think if Christians take that interpretation, I think they're missing the point. When Jesus is saying this, he actually does mean that when we're talking, we should let our yes be yes and our no be no, meaning we should say the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, but not just because we're under oath.

Let me give you an example. Mr. A, Mr. B, and Mr. C all see Mr. X rob a bank. When asked about it later, Mr. A says, I didn't see him rob a bank. I don't think he did.

Mr. B says, uh, him may have been there. And Mr. C says, yeah, I think that's his bank. Who lied? Well, they all did. They say, well, no, hang on now. One of them outright lied. Sure, but the other two, they were just not giving the whole truth. But is this not lying? Is this not a misrepresentation of the truth? Matthew 12 says that we will be held responsible for every idle word we say.

So it doesn't matter if we're under oath or not. Jesus is saying as Christians, we live every hour, every minute, every moment as under oath.

[14:11] And so we have to let our yes be yes and our no be no. And so we have to ask ourselves, do we hit this qualification? And again, the answer is no.

So our hangman gets a leg now. All right, moving on to the next one. Does no wrong to a neighbor. You might be saying, I got this one. This one's okay. I don't know my neighbors. I'm fine on this one. I'm saying, hang on, not so fast. Jesus again, he comes back on the Sermon on the Mount and redefines who our neighbors are. I'm not sorry. I'm not on the Sermon on the Mount. The very famous parable of the Good Samaritan.

Sorry. Sermon on the Mount was earlier. But in the Good Samaritan, what is so shocking about that story is the fact that it was an Israelite that was hurt, but it was the Samaritan sworn enemies of each other that came and helped him.

And so Jesus in that story redefines who our neighbors are. He says, everyone is your neighbor.

And so if you have wronged someone before, you have broken this command.

[15:23] You have done wrong to a neighbor. I mean, again, this can kind of go back all the way to point one of no one has lived a blameless life. Have you ever lied? Have you ever gossiped? Have you ever disobeyed a boss, a parent?

All right. You are guilty of this one. I'm guilty of this one. So now it's starting to look a little grim for our hangman. He gets another leg.

It continues on, though, and in the passage, the traveler says he casts no slur on others, meaning that the person that is trying to attain rest does not destroy the name of another person.

Obviously, this can mean physical. Don't get into a fight with anybody else, obviously. But I don't think many of us are prone to fistfights in the congregation. If you are, Steve's right there.

You can talk to him. But what the psalmist could be talking about here and is talking about is verbally.

[16:22] How many times have you torn somebody else down with your words? How many have you cast a slur against somebody else by your words? Again, this goes back to the gossiping.

And this one is hard in our society because it can be so easy to gain social standing with somebody by gossiping about somebody else, right? Having fun at somebody else's expense.

Tearing down someone else. And this can be hard, but we have to come to the grips and realize that this is a sin. And so our hangman, once again, we realize that we do not meet the qualifications for this rest.

And our hangman has now got an arm. The psalmist and the traveler continues in verse 4. He says, Who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the Lord. This one seems easy, right? Condemn the bad, honor the good. But is this often true? Do we often look at the moral filth of the world and turn away? Or are we sucked in?

[17 : 30] I can say it from my own life when I look at the television, half the time, whenever something morally filthy comes up, I almost feel this pull to go further in rather than farther away.

It's a sinful nature inside of me that sucks me in. But I can even say, would the opposite of this be true? We all like to say, hey, we can fight against this bad thing. But how about, do we honor the righteousness of others?

Do we honor those who fear the Lord? For me, again, my sinful heart looks at this and almost thinks of those people as being too pompous, too righteous.

I can manipulate it in my heart to where the people that should have honor and should be honored, I get jealous of them for having that honor.

And so once again, if we were honest with ourselves, we would fail this expectation. Our hangman is not looking so good now, is he?

[18 : 31] The problem is, is there's more to go. The traveler says, keeps an oath and does not change. We're going to look at these together because they're more or less the same problem and because I think we're getting tired of realizing that we can't amount up, right?

G.K. Chesterton says, the man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. In other words, what he's saying here is that the man that makes a promise says, regardless of what happens in the future, I will be there.

A promise frees you. Now, if you're thinking about that, you might think, Seth, I think you just misspoke. The opposite would be true, right?

But if we think about it, a promise frees us from the whims of whatever may happen in the future. Only by promising can we prevent from being carried away by an unpredictable future.

The very obvious example of this is marriage, right? When you get married, when you say, I do, to your spouse, you are promising to love them today, tomorrow, and 10 years in the future.

[19 : 48] You are saying it doesn't matter what happens in the future, I will love you. It doesn't matter if you start losing your hair.

It doesn't matter if we change houses. It doesn't matter if we have kids, you change jobs. It doesn't matter. I promise that no matter what, I will love you.

That's the oath that you're taking. That's what it means in sickness and in health for richer or for poorer. No matter what happens in the future, I am promising to love you.

But have we ever gone back on a promise? Remember, we're going to be judged for every idle word that we say. So if anybody ever invited you over and you've said, oh yeah, I'll be there, and you had no intention of showing up.

Or one of my favorite ones, when somebody texts you and says, hey, are you far away? And you're like, yeah, I'm five minutes, I'll be there soon. And you haven't even gotten on the tube yet. I'm definitely guilty of that one.

[20 : 54] That's breaking an oath, right? That's lying. If we're going to be held accountable for every idle word, that is changing. That's us breaking this qualification for rest.

And so if we start to look, our hangman starts to get a little bit ridiculous at this point. And so we're going to give them eyes. This is when you're playing Hamming, this depends on how generous the person is with you, right?

Some people could have ended the game by now, but we're going to say that, hey, we're going to be a little more generous, we'll give them eyes. We have just a few more. Who lends money to the poor without interest is the next qualification as the psalmist goes on.

And this one seems easy to understand, right? Lend money to the less fortunate, and if you lend money to the less fortunate, don't charge them interest on it. But can you, I think that this one even goes a little bit further.

It says, don't lend with the expectation to profit in return. Basically, when your neighbor comes and asks you for some flour for his cake, another reason to get to know your neighbors, you might get cake.

[21 : 55] But you should give your flour to that neighbor without the expectation of getting a piece of that cake. Without the expectation that he'll come back and pay you for the flour that he's used.

Instead, we should have a generous heart. See, the 2 Corinthians says that God loves the cheerful giver. So have you ever been guilty of lending and expecting something in return?

All right? Once again, we cannot meet this qualification of rest, and our hangman gets a nose this time. I started to run out of space on this. Lastly, who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. A bribe is a favor or a gift with an obligation to listen to what the briber is saying in return. Basically, if you accept a bribe, you are compromised. Your judgment can no longer be trusted.

Again, we think of this as the politician, right? The one that takes a bribe so that they can push through whatever legislation that person wants to be pushed through, and you can no longer trust their judgment.

[23 : 02] But what about us? Have we ever given with the expectation to receive? Have we ever given to church of our time and volunteered there so that we might be recognized by the leaders or our peers at church?

Have we ever volunteered, maybe not at church, but with another organization so that we can have a good feeling about the other parts of our lives that maybe are not so good? Have we ever given money, maybe to the church, maybe to another organization, to ease our conscience?

In essence, what we are trying to do there is we are trying to bribe God to receive, just even for a moment, the rest that the traveler is promising here in Psalm 15.

But it will not work. That rest that we're trying to experience is more fleeting than the morning dew. So we'll finish off our hangman here with a frowny face.

And see, the traveler here has laid out a very extensive list, right? Like, you can feel the weight of this just hit your shoulders. Do this, obey that, be better.

[24 : 20] And we can't do it. We feel like the psalmist from the previous psalms, right? We are in the pit. We are lamenting. And every time that we struggle, every time we look up to this mountain and want to get to that rest, we actually just tighten the noose a little bit tighter around our necks and end up like our hangman friend here.

And that makes the realization of the third point even harder to hear. So we started with the question who can dwell with the Lord. We got the answer that it has to be the righteous person, right?

We went through a long list. And then we get the result. Look at the end of verse 5. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

You think, okay, this is the part, Seth, this is the part where you give me hope. I've been waiting for this, let's get into it. And you think, oh yes, this is the part. This will be lovely. If we just obey the laws, we will be able to get up into that holy mountain and never be moved.

Our rest can be secured. That's where we're going. But even then, our joy turns to dismay because we remember we don't hit these qualifications. We don't pass this test.

[25 : 43] We are like the hangman done in by our failures. We are like and if we ended the story here, we would be preaching a gospel that says, do this, be better, try harder.

But that is not where this story ends. There's a twist and if you're just reading through the psalm, you might miss it. Look back at verse 1 for me.

Verse 1 says, Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?

Where does the traveler want to dwell? He wants to dwell in God's sacred tent on top of the mountain.

He wants to dwell in a tent. This is no small detail. See, when God delivered his people from Egypt, they were travelers, right? Where were they travelers to?

A promised land. A land that had been promised them years before. And on their journey, God had commissioned a spot for his presence to dwell with the people.

[26 : 52] What did he have commissioned? A tabernacle, a.k.a. a tent. He didn't have a palace built for them to take along with.

He didn't have a sanctuary where his presence could dwell, but a tent. He wanted a tent at the time where his people were dwelling in tents.

God chose his dwelling as a tent because it was a foreshadowing of what would happen thousands of years later. This time, though, when he would send his son, it would be as a man and his son would come in bodily form, not as a tent, but he would come as a baby.

And that man would grow up, that baby would grow up, into a man that would hit every single qualification that we have just talked about.

He would live the perfect life. He would do what was right. He would speak the truth. He would fear the Lord. He would keep his word. And he would climb that mountain to the holy rest that God had promised.

[28 : 12] But instead of taking the reward that was due him, he said no and took on our sin, the shame, the things that we couldn't do so that we could enter that rest.

So now when we get to the end of our lives and we get up to that mountain to want to dwell with the tent of the Lord, we get up there, the Lord doesn't look at us and say, oh, you failed this, you missed that.

Instead, he says, the righteousness of my son is imputed, is given to you because he died for you. And we can hear the words, well done, good and faithful servant.

So if you're a Christian in the room, rejoice. This is the good news. This is what we celebrate at Easter, right? This is the gospel. Let this teaching warm your heart.

Let it encourage you to go out and share with your friends, with your co-workers, with your neighbors, that this is what we have been saved for. This is the reason that Easter exists. And if you're a non-Christian in the room, let that truth sink in.

[29 : 21] Think in a little bit. And ask yourself, are my works enough to enter rest? See, all Odysseus wanted to do was to go home and enter rest with his wife.

But see, Odysseus, in order to enter that rest, had to go through a ten-year journey where the gods were trying to teach him some vague lesson. I don't know, I remember it from English class. And he had to go through trial after trial after trial to finally get there.

But for the Christian, true rest doesn't come after you've cleaned yourself up. It doesn't come after you have done something. It comes when you accept that the riches of Christ are yours, not because you have done anything, but because he gave them when he died and was buried, and was resurrected three days later.

And now all it takes is us to call him savior and to want to have a relationship with him. And we can climb that mountain, enter the tent, and have rest.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for today. Just thank you for your word. Lord, I'm struck by how often I fail, struck by how much I fail.

[30 : 54] But Lord, I'm thankful that a gospel of grace means that it is not up to me. Father, we pray that this truth would be proclaimed throughout our great city, on Sunday, on Friday, throughout this week, as we lead up to Easter, and that people would see that they need you.

And they would realize that their works are not good enough, but yours are. Lord, we pray these things in your name. Amen.

Let's