

Psalms 18-10-04a

This is Thursday, the 4th of October, 2018. Just always astonishes me when I think about the year, 2018. Remember getting up as a little kid for church and Pastor Pack would be on on Sunday mornings talking about prophecy and how the whole thing could be over by 1988, which was still 12 or 13 years in the future because that would be a generation from the creation of Israel in 1948.

I thought, 88, that is so far away. Well, what are we now, 30 years hence from that. Anyway, this is the year 2018 and this is October the 4th and we're continuing our study of the book of Psalms.

We are going to be picking up this evening with Psalm 15. Psalm 15, as we say in the artillery, it's right after, if you're looking for it, it's right after Psalm 14 in your Bible. Let's take a moment as we approach the study of God's word to go to the Lord in prayer, ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our investigation of what David has to tell us here, shall we pray? Father, we always look forward to partaking of the supernatural sustenance that is found in your word.

We are happy to set aside the normal routine and the cares of this life and the challenges and the opportunities to rest and refresh our souls at the oasis of your word. We thank you for its presence and the gift we have of these 66 books that have been preserved and made available to us as never before in this time. We thank you for those who have given diligent effort and in some cases, even their lives so that we could have our own copy of it.

We know that they have served according to your will and will receive their reward for their labors. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit that enables us to make sense of it, to remember it, to see how it applies when the time comes for that application. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ through whose obedience and sacrifice we enjoy all of these wonderful benefits and such a great hope for the future as well as sustaining grace for the present.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this evening that your Holy Spirit will minister to our hearts so that we can reflect the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives now and in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Psalm 15, it is superscribed as a Psalm of David and that always gives us a little bit of additional appreciation because we know so much about David's life.

There are very few lives in scripture that are given in as much detail as David's. And I'm reviewing the first and second Samuel studies that we did some years ago and it is hard to find a more enriching part of God's word to study than that biographical account because we are given the full gamut of his life, his ups, his downs, his highs, his lows, his successes, his failures, and then we're given insight into his thinking and his heart in these compositions we have in the Psalms. So it is always a delight and an encouragement to study and see that in spite of all

of the things that David went through, and of course all of the biblical characters did, but we just know so much more about David than virtually any other.

And I think in many ways, his heart reflects the heart of the Lord Jesus himself who had to endure a lot in his life from those who misunderstood him, who tried to manipulate him, who tried to suppress him and keep him from accomplishing his mission and his purpose. And behind that, of course, the rulers of the darkness of this age. And we often feel like we ourselves are in a similar state of opposition as we try to move forward.

So this particular Psalm, Psalm 15, as a Psalm of David follows Psalm 14, and I humorously refer to that, but it is a nice segue because what did we have a week before last when we studied Psalm 14? That was the description of category fool and the nature of his thinking and the nature of his actions, how he can be spotted and avoided. But God is with the generation of the righteous. And so we now in Psalm 15 are going to have a balancing description.

Let's read it. It is a Psalm of David. And it begins here in your text, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks up rightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart.

He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend. In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord. He who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved. One of the more interesting comments I saw, and I really only read about two commentaries this week because I was fascinated by the text itself and I was, you know, digging away with my spade and my shovel and my pigmatic and the rest of it.

And I didn't really probably check around as much other opinion or interpretation as I sometimes do. But one of the ones I did check is my go-to commentary that I disagree with a lot. I just always like to hear somebody who thinks differently than me because many times they know something I don't.

But he said, you know, the thing about this Psalm 15 is when you read it, you think it's kind of shallow. And I thought, well, you know, even for somebody who disagrees with me to say that David is being shallow. But he said, honestly, take a look at it.

It doesn't imbibe deeply from the waters of the well of the river of life. You know, it just says, you know, who can go worship the Lord? Somebody who's doing good things and not doing bad things. And he said, you know, on the surface, it just doesn't seem to be that deep.

Well, of course, that always piques my interest when somebody says, well, this thing doesn't have a lot to offer. And so I thought, well, you know, I'm gonna leave off reading these guys and just see if he's right. Is this really just kind of treasure laying on the surface, shall we say?

And if it's not very deep, maybe I ought to skip it.

You know, I don't think I'm gonna do all 150 Psalms. I'll just tell you now, I think we'd be probably six or 700 years into the millennium before I would finish. So I wanna do this first set until I start seeing ones that are similar to what we've already seen.

So far, don't you think they've all been unique and they partake of something that's kind of a fresh area? Like the hymnal, and this is the hymnal of Israel, there's gonna come a time when we're gonna start to see just a slight variation. It doesn't mean it's not important or not worth studying, but in the interest of a survey of the Psalms, rather than an exhaustive verse-by-verse of the entire thing, there will come a point where I'll start leaping forward to find those that are best suited to our purpose, which is to gain an understanding of what the Psalms offer. And many of these, once you've seen Psalm 14, you can go to Psalm 53 and it's largely the same.

But this one is unique and it does, on the surface, just seem to be a little bit self-evident, shall we say. Who can come into the Lord's presence? Somebody who's doing right and not doing wrong, essentially. However, let me, and so I just set all that aside and I said, well, let me go in and I'm just gonna look at this thing and translate it for myself and just see what I am struck by as I go.

And the first thing, as an English major, that I will tell you is I think it's punctuated wrong. And I'm gonna tell you why. And specifically, the question mark at the end of verse one, in my humble opinion, is in the wrong place.

And there's actually two of them there in verse one. But it says, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? One of the first things I discovered is there are a lot of witnesses to the Hebrew text. It's not like Greek, where we've got 6,000 potential witnesses and lots of copies and copies of copies and so on that you can go to and kind of get a, take a majority vote or take a critical vote.

It's just like opinion today. Do you wanna just survey what everybody, this is, I'm talking about the Greek texts and how many of them there are. You can say, well, here's the majority of what people think.

Well, sometimes the majority of people don't know all the facts or have got some other thing going on under their bonnet. And so you say, well, I'm not gonna necessarily go by the majority. I'll find the smart people or the ones that are the best read or the most informed or seem to be most reliable.

Well, this is the way it is in textual criticism. Sometimes you just say, what do most of the texts say? Other times you say, what do the better texts, the ones that seem to be more reliable and closer to the original manuscript autograph, what do they say? And it's not always one and it's not always the other. You gotta take it case by case.

Well, here, there are witnesses to the text and one of the first variations here, and I think it is

significant, is it doesn't say tabernacle in a lot of them. It says tense, plural, tense, plural. Now, if this was in fact the tabernacle, why would anybody pluralize it? You have to ask yourself, if I find a variant, what would explain it? It is more likely that somebody found tense in the plural and said, well, wait a minute, God doesn't have many tense, he's only got one tense.

So let's just chop off that. It's just a little yode at the end, basically. So why don't we just lop that off and just have it say tabernacle and that'll be simpler.

And so I can more easily explain singular than I can say, how would somebody end up making it plural? So let me say to begin with, I think it's plural. And I think you'll see why as we go along. So just provisionally, you can cross out tabernacle and put tense.

Let me also say that these earlier Psalms are likely, it's not necessarily so, but they are likely to be from David's earlier career. This is book one of the Psalter. You would expect that you'd go and get the oldest songs and stick them in first, just provisionally, it's a thought, I wouldn't die for it.

But I tend to think that ones from David's earlier career are gonna be in the front and later ones would have been added later. What do we know about the situation of the tabernacle in David's early days? There ain't one. Remember in the days of Samuel, the thing fell apart to rags and you just had the Ark of the Covenant sitting out by itself, right? And when was there a tent associated with the presence of God in the career of David? Only very briefly.

Remember the Samuel, Eli, sons of Eli, Philistines, rats and tumors comes back. And when David becomes king and consolidates his kingdom, he says, let's bring the thing in. You have Uzzah and everybody that was celebrating suddenly is very sober and they say, let's just stop right where it is and it sits.

And so then there is a time and David eventually builds a tent to put the Ark in. But it's not the tabernacle. There's not a table of showbread.

There's not a candlestick. There's not the veils and cherubim. He just, it's like people that have a travel trailer.

I've entertained this thought. You have a travel trailer and you think, well, you know, I'd like a little extra protection for it. Let me just get, you've seen these things, poles with a little aluminum turnip shaped top or whatever from the front.

So he does that. He makes this a little shelter to keep the thing dry when it rains. But this does not fit that, don't you think? When does the Ark finally have a resting place? Not really until Solomon builds the temple.

So who may abide in your tents suggests, and even if it was singular tent, I still would argue this because of the word abide, because of the word abide and because of the second phrase here. So this begins with David identifying his audience and he says, oh Yahweh. After this says

a misnomer of David, the first word is the Tetragrammaton, Yahweh.

Lord, and then me. You've heard me give that old saw about the pronouns in Hebrew. Who is he and he is she and me is who and so on.

Well, me is who, me, who? Who may abide? This word, this verb, *gur*, is really interesting because it's most often translated sojourn, to sojourn. Now, if Abraham was a sojourner, what does that imply? What does it connote? When somebody is sojourning, are they on their own land or are they on somebody else's land? You don't sojourn in your own country. It means to dwell in a place that belongs to somebody else.

That's what *gur* means. So it is often translated, sometimes the noun form means stranger. I'm a stranger in a strange land.

I'm a sojourner in a land in which I am sojourning. So who may, there's a lot of words for abide, remain, dwell, live, occupy in Hebrew, but this is the one that means to abide as a guest. And that's how I would translate it to get the meaning of this word as opposed to others.

Who may abide as a guest in your tents? Who may be a welcome visitor in your tents? That's what it is to sojourn. Abide as a guest, be a welcomed visitor because it ain't your house. It's not your place, it's God's place, but you are enjoying his hospitality.

You are someone receiving God's hospitality as if you were visiting someone's tents and staying for an extended period. Who may dwell as a welcome visitor in your tents? Who may circulate in your presence over a period of time is the idea. And that's why tents is a useful metaphor because it means you're there like my daughter Elizabeth came and sojourned in her parents' tents for many weeks this past summer.

She was recuperating from an ankle injury and it was great to be able to have her and her pets up here to take care of her and help her regain her mobility and so on. And she's a welcome guest, but it's not technically her house. It's somebody else's house, but she's as welcome as anybody could be, right? So that's the idea of *Gur*.

So David is asking the question, he says, and this is clearly a question, who is welcome in your tents as a visitor? Then he says again, who may dwell, and this is a different word. This is more of a permanent idea. This has the idea of abiding and remaining in a place at rest.

So you visit the Lord's tents, which are pitched on a hill and you have your own place also on the hill. The hill is bigger than the tents, right? Typically, you don't want your tent bigger than the hill. Hill in the middle of the tent, it's kind of inconvenient.

Instead, you have a large hill. You have a dwelling tent on top of the hill. You are a welcome visitor to the tents of the Lord and you dwell nearby, right up there on the hill.

Think about the New Jerusalem. Think about those who are going to dwell in Zion. Think about

the wolf laying down with the kid and the child playing near the serpents and all that.

That is not a description of the world in the millennial kingdom. That is a description of Zion in the millennial kingdom. It is the Garden of Eden versus what happens outside.

And if everything was ironic and the peaceable kingdom throughout the world, why would the Lord need a rod of iron? Why would He have to smash anything? Because the closer you are to the presence of God, the more secure and peaceful and free of harm and danger it is. So to be a welcome visitor in God's tents and then to abide in His holy hill, you're a next door neighbor to God's tents. That's pretty special.

So who can do that? Now, just bear with me. I'm gonna flick just a little bit of grammar on you here. See verse two, how many things are mentioned there? You can say it out loud.

How many things do you count? How many characteristics? You got walking, working, and speaking, right? Three things. And this appears to be an answer to the question because you've got the question marks up there after who may abide, who may dwell, right? Who can be a welcome guest? Who can live next door on the holy hill? Well, the one who can abide and dwell is the one who walks uprightly, works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. I respectfully disagree.

And here's why. These three characteristics are not perfect tenses in the Greek, I'm sorry, in the Hebrew. They're not in the Greek either, but we're not talking about the Greek.

They are I-N-G words. They are participles. I've said an infinitude of times across the years, you can spot a participle in Hebrew because instead of gaal, G-A-A-L, which means to redeem, a redeemer is a gaal, O-E.

The O-E infix is like putting I-N-G on the word. All of these are I-N-G words. Now, why is that important? Why do we care? Because this continues the description of the person in verse one, who is a welcome guest in God's tents, dwelling as a next door neighbor on God's hill, who is walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth in his heart.

How can you become that person? These are five characteristics. David says, who can be the ones in God's immediate presence, in God's peripheral presence, who can be the one walking uprightly, who can be the one working righteousness, and who can be the one speaking truth in his heart? This becomes immediately a more compelling question, and it is not shallow. I would love to know the secret of walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth in my heart.

These aren't necessarily things you can just decide. You can't just say, well, good morning, Lord. I appreciate you giving me another day.

Here I go. I'm walking uprightly. I'm working righteousness, and I'm gonna speak the truth in my heart.

I want to know how to do those things, and how to keep my feet in those steps where I'm walking uprightly, how to keep my works in the realm of righteousness, and how to keep my speaking truthful, emanating from my heart. I am transparent. It's like Jesus talking about the light of the body being the eye, and if you've got light inside, the light will come out your eye.

It's all one thing. You're consistent inside and out. In other words, no hypocrisy.

How can I remain qualified? How can I be the person who, in God's immediate and peripheral presence, is walking, working, and speaking as they should? That's the question, okay? Now, the Hebrew verbs change, and there's not gonna be another participle related to this person in the whole rest of the psalm. The participles are at the beginning. So the way I would translate this is, Lord, who may dwell as a welcome guest in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill, walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth in his heart? Who can do that? Notice that this is an expansion of the two great commands that the Lord Jesus summarized, the whole Old Testament law, love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor, right? The first two are qualified to be in God's presence.

The next three are how you operate in the world. You're walking, working, and speaking from the heart as someone who dwells in God's presence. So that's my suggestion as to how to take this, and it's because of these participles.

If the answer to the question continued in verse two, three, and four as a unit, it seems odd that the verbs change. So let's take that as the question. How can I be this person? And notice that the tense are the intimate, personal, and immediate presence of God.

The holy hill is all around God. You may not be in his immediate presence, but you're pretty close. You can get there with a few steps.

And your walk, your work, and your thinking slash speaking are all approved in God's sight. It's a description of an individual. Whether you look at them in their vertical or in their horizontal relationships, they're right where they need to be.

So who can do that? So in my view, the answer begins in verse three. And you have three negatives that answer to the three positives that were given in verse two. Who can be the one walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth in his heart in the immediate and peripheral presence of God? Somebody who avoids these three things.

Here are three things to avoid in order to be that five-fold person in verses one and two. And notice the *who* is in italics there. So who can abide in God's tense and dwell on his holy hill, walking uprightly, working righteousness, speaking truth in his heart? He does not backbite with his tongue.

He does not do evil to his neighbor. He does not take up a reproach against his friend. This is how he remains qualified to be on the hill and in the tense, and his walk, his works, and his thoughts and speech are pure.

So think about Psalm one. Blessed is the man who, and then you have a bunch of, you have three negatives. Remember that? Blessed is the man who walks uprightly, who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, does not stand in the way of sinners, does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

You wanna be blessed? Don't do these three things. Well, here, if you wanna have that five-fold blessing in verses one and two, don't backbite with your tongue, don't do evil to your neighbor, and don't take up a reproach against your friend. What I find interesting in verse three here is there are, first of all, backbite, and that's kind of a peculiar word even in English.

I think I'd love to look up the etymology. How do you get to backbite? Is this biting somebody's back? Is this referring to a dog that sneaks up behind you and bites you somehow? What is backbiting at? Where does it come from in Hebrew? Well, this is ragal, R-A-G-A-L is the verb. And the roglim, notice, rogel, the ones doing this, rogelim, were spies.

To be a rogel was to be a reconnaissance guy, to be a spy. And this word is translated spy out numerous times in scripture. About 20 times it's translated either spy or spy out.

So how do you not spy with your tongue? Well, what does it mean to spy? It means to investigate and try to find out the details of a thing, right? This is actually related to the word for your feet, and it means to tiptoe along, to walk along, to walk around. If you're gonna spy, in the old days, they didn't have drones and radio surveillance and all that. So if you wanted to find out what was going on, you had to do like the spies that went to Canaan and stayed at Rahab's house.

You had to go, you had to foot it. And rogel almost literally means to foot it, to tiptoe. Well, so how do you tiptoe around somebody's business with your tongue? Well, you discuss it, you bring it up, you air it out in a group, and speculate and insinuate, and you keep this thing going kind of like you see in the media this week while the FBI is investigating our Supreme Court nominee, there's just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk.

They are rogeling this. This is what this word means. You take your tongue and you wag it to somebody's detriment.

Yeah, they're not saying, you know, I'm sure this thing's gonna come up clean. I mean, look at the guy's record. All they're saying is, you know, I heard, and well, you know, it's probably this, and I think it's that, and yuck, yuck, yuck, yuck, yuck.

Rogel. So do you want to be in God's presence as a welcome guest? Do you want to be in God's environment as a permanent close-by dweller? Do you want to walk uprightly? Do you want to work what is right? Do you want to have truth in your heart that comes out your mouth? Then don't wag your tongue at all. It says, he who does not wag his tongue, who doesn't spy, reconnoiter, just keep turning anything over and over verbally, and by verbally, you gotta have a partner, right? I do know a few people, but not very many, who will just walk around talking to

themselves and argue with themselves and, you know, air the thing out and say, well, you know, it could be this or it could be that, you know, out loud.

Typically not. It's most of the time a, you know, little group activity. So the second description here, nor does evil to his neighbor, and the third description, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.

This is sort of, and here's another reason why I think verse two goes with verse one, and that these are in four line groups, because verse three reverses the order of what you have in verse two. If you are speaking the truth in your heart, you are not ragging with your tongue. See how they, they're like a, you put a mirror between verse two and verse three, and the first line of verse three answers the last line of verse two.

The one speaking the truth in his heart does not backbite with his tongue. Does not wag his tongue. The one working righteousness, the middle line of verse two, does not do evil to his neighbor.

And the one walking uprightly does not walk around with a reproach against his friend. The word here that says take up means to carry a burden, to carry a load, to carry something around. To receive it, take it up, and transport it from place to place.

Wherever you are, there it is. You've got it strapped to you. You're carrying it about.

And instead of walking upright, you're walking bent over with this load of gossip or this freight of grudge or whatever else it might be. This reproach, this shame. So you see the coming back out? If you want to be the guy that is in verse one and two, then you don't do the things in verse three, and he answers them in reverse order, and he continues in verse four.

In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord. Notice the last word in verse four is the first word in verse one. That is no accident.

We're coming right back out. It's just a chiasm. You can just put links to each one of those lines with the dividing line between verse two and verse three.

Verse three and verse four mirror the order of ideas in verse one and two. So this is why I think the question mark belongs at the end of verse two. Well, what does this mean to do evil to your neighbor? Is this just a general kind of evil? What does it mean to take up a reproach against his friend? Is there a difference in a neighbor and a friend? It's two different words here.

What are they? Well, we're gonna pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll finish up this psalm. Let me just say this.

If you are someone who loves God and who is grateful because of the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf, then you are someone who wants to be in God's tents and you are someone who wants to dwell in God's holy hill. This psalm from David examines that. And I

will show you after the break the passage of scripture that I think David had probably recently heard reviewed in Bible study with his family or reviewed by one of the priests that was in his periphery.

But these ideas are all very succinctly contained in a passage from the law. And the vocabulary is the same. The ideas are the same.

And this is David taking what God's word said and recasting it, reflecting on it, meditating on it. Remember what he said in psalm one. In that law does he meditate day and night.

I will suggest to you that this psalm 15 reflects David's meditation on the law. And this is what he concluded. And it's a thing of beauty.

And this is the kind of revelation and the kind of insight that we gain when we reflect on the word of God in our souls. And with the ministry and the influence of God's holy spirit, when we are asking and seeking and knocking, Lord, how can I be better than I am? How can I be qualified to draw nearer to you and closer to the Lord Jesus Christ? Be one of those overcomers in Revelation chapter two and chapter three. Be one of those that's gonna ride with the Lord Jesus on horses and walk with him in white and receive the white stone and the new name and sit with him on his throne and be useful and qualified and prepared and have an understanding of what's going on when the Lord Jesus returns.

This is your psalm. This is the how-to. David looked at his copy of the word of God, which only had five books, and this is what he derived from it.

God can reveal to us the same elegant, succinct, beautiful truths when we reflect on his word the way David is. So we'll look at the rest of this when we come back from our break.