

Psalm 15

1. *Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may rest upon your holy hill?*
2. *Whoever leads an uncorrupt life and does the thing that is right;*
3. *Who speaks the truth from the heart and bears no deceit on the tongue;*
4. *Who does no evil to a friend and pours no scorn on a neighbour;*
5. *In whose sight the wicked are not esteemed, but who honours those who fear the Lord.*
6. *Whoever has sworn to a neighbour and never goes back on that word;*
7. *Who does not lend money in hope of gain, nor takes a bribe against the innocent;*
8. *Whoever does these things shall never fail.*

Refrain

Those who do what is right
will dwell in the presence of the Lord.

Psalm 15 is an entrance liturgy for the temple, where certain conditions had to be fulfilled before admission. Usually, these stipulations concerned ritual, but, in this psalm, they demand moral purity.

As they approach the temple, the pilgrims enquire of the priests at the gate what the rules are. (v.1. 'Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle?') The priests reply with a description of the character, which is pleasing to God, ending with a promise of blessing for those who conform. In general, they must lead an uncorrupt life. Vv. 3-5 give more specific details. The blameless person avoids slander or gossip. He values other people on the basis of their relationship to God, rather than on the amount of money which they have. He keeps his word, even if that puts him at a disadvantage, and he will not demand interest from a fellow Israelite (interest rates could be between 33⅓ and 50%). He will not try to gain influence in the community by accepting a bribe. ('who does lend money in hope of gain, nor takes a bribe against the innocent.')

This loyalty is rewarded by prosperity in the community. (v.8 'Whoever does these things shall never fail.')

When Jesus comes, however, he renews all this and reveals that we do not need to earn a place in God's community. Which of us is entirely blameless, anyway? We have a tendency to gossip, sometimes to engage in slander, and we may let our friends down or at times be scornful. We make mistakes, misunderstand and sometimes turn away from God. Yet, we are all, whoever we are, invited into God's kingdom and loved as part of his creation. For example, the woman in John's Gospel, caught in adultery, is not condemned by Jesus, even if he disapproves of what she has done. She is forgiven and shown that she is loved by God.

So, it is by grace that we can enter God's temple and take our place in his community. Christ, who alone is uncorrupt, invites us to enter with him and to share with him in his risen life. We are free to accept or reject that invitation. We enter the temple, the kingdom of God, by his free and gracious work. It is all summed up in this hymn:

When Christ was lifted from the earth
his hands outstretched above
to every culture, every birth
to draw an answering love.

Still east and west his love extends,
and always near or far,
he calls and claims us as his friends
and loves us as we are.

Thus freely loved, though fully known,
may I in Christ be free
to welcome and accept his own
as Christ accepted me.

(Hymns A&M New Standard, 525)

Prayer

Almighty God,
by whose grace alone we are accepted
and called to your serve:
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit
and make us worthy of our calling;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

(Collect for Lent – 5)