

Who'd make a good guest in God's House?

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[0 : 00] Well, I do know that some of you here in the building have taken the life in the UK test. You've passed it too, so well done. Now, the test is part of an application for citizenship in the United Kingdom, where you get 45 minutes, I believe, to answer 24 multiple choice questions.

And other questions are about British customs and British traditions that probably most British people don't know much about anyway. But there's a handbook that you can get to revise for the test and prepare for it.

And the questions you're asked are on the values and the principles of the United Kingdom, on the traditions and the culture from around the UK, on different events and people that have shaped the UK's history on the government and the law and how you can get involved in your community and so on and so on.

Now, just moving on from what it takes to be a good citizen in the United Kingdom and how that is assessed, whether you are fit to be a good citizen or not. Moving on from that, Psalm 15 is actually about citizenship in God's kingdom.

In fact, it's essentially asking the question, who'd make a good guest in God's house? Who'd make a good guest in God's house? In other words, what kind of person do you need to be in order to gain access into God's presence?

[1 : 32] And Psalm 15 provides the answer by sketching for us a picture profile of that kind of person. It basically gives us a character description.

Athanasius, who was one of the early church fathers, said this. He said, if you want to learn what citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is like, sing Psalm 15.

We just have been singing Psalm 15. So we should know what citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is like. And so what we're going to do this afternoon is look at Psalm 15 because it's part of our series looking at the vision for Christ Church Glasgow.

And today we're thinking about loving each other. And so there's a picture describing our vision. And when the second section, the second segment loving each other last week, we thought about that involved being part of a community, the church community.

And this week we're going to think about membership, a membership of the church is vital to loving each other. Now, when it comes to Psalm 15, commentators often refer to it as an entrance liturgy.

[2 : 41] And that's because the focus is on the entrance requirements for approaching the sanctuary, the place where God is. But you notice how the entrance requirements are all basically about right living.

And so the Psalm instructs the worshiper to live a God honoring and God fearing life. Now, it's obvious when we read the Psalm or when we sing the Psalm that it is impossible for any human being to meet the requirements of Psalm 15.

Nobody can possibly match the character description that is presented here. And so as we take our Christ centered approach to interpreting the Psalms, it is clear that there is only one who can fit the bill.

One person who meets the requirements here in Psalm 15. And that, of course, is Jesus Christ.

He's the only one. He's the only person, the only one who is fit to enter into God's presence.

And yet, as the church, that privilege of entering into God's presence extends to everybody who is united to Jesus Christ.

[4 : 01] To those who have faith in Christ and are members of his body, the church, Jesus, enables us to have access to God. And so Psalm 15 starts with a question, verse one.

It follows with an answer, verse two to five. And then it ends with a promise, verse five. So we're going to look at it under three headings this afternoon to see what it means to be in a relationship

with God and a member of the church.

Who would make a good guest in God's house? Psalm 15 tells us. So first of all, we see a clear question. Second, an impossible answer. And third, a solid promise.

First of all, let's think about this clear question. David is the one who asks it. The Psalm is written by David. So verse one says, Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain? So there's a question addressed to the covenant God. That's why we've got capital letters, Lord, here. Sacred tent refers to the tabernacle.

[5 : 08] Remember, the tabernacle was that huge ornate tent that traveled with God's people through the wilderness. It was the tent of God's dwelling where he would meet with his people before the temple was built.

And then it speaks about the holy mountain. The holy mountain refers to the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. So both the tabernacle and the temple represent the location on earth, the physical space or place of God's presence with his people.

The place of God's dwelling on earth. And so David is basically asking, well, who may approach God and dwell with him?

And the repeated who emphasizes that access to God isn't easy. Human beings can't just saunter on up to God. In fact, it's impossible for human beings like you and me to dwell with God.

Sinful human beings can't enter the presence of a holy God. And if you know your Bible, if you've read through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and so on, this was made crystal clear to God's people, the Israelites.

[6 : 25] So in the book of Exodus, before God even gave them instructions for making this big tent, the tabernacle. If they even touched the mountain where God's presence was, they'd be killed.

So everything connected with worship for the Israelites. So the priesthood and the sacrifices and the tabernacle, all of it was basically communicating just how unapproachable God is.

It's saying you can't get near him. It's impossible. Until, of course, the one to whom it all pointed came. So the sacrifices and the priesthood and the temple were pointing, of course, to Jesus Christ. And so the tabernacle and the temple are fulfilled when John tells us at the beginning of his gospel, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Now, the word for dwelling in John 1.14 is actually the word that means to tabernacle. Jesus coming to dwell on earth. And then when you read the story of Jesus, his sacrifice on the cross, it's what makes access to God possible.

[7 : 42] And that was symbolized. Remember when Jesus died on the cross, what happened at the temple in Jerusalem? That the huge curtain that kept people out saying you can't get near God because of your sin.

It was ripped in two from top to bottom, saying the way is now open for human beings to gain access into God's presence. And so that's why there couldn't be a more important question to ask than who can get access to God.

And that's the question this psalm answers for us. But it doesn't answer it in the way that perhaps we might expect. Because the psalm doesn't say access into God's presence comes from being a really religious person.

So if you follow religious ceremonies and rituals, if your religious observance is good, if your religious performance is good, well then maybe God will accept you into his presence if you do all this stuff.

But it's got nothing to do with achievements. It's got nothing to do with good works or religious observance or performance. No, what we see in the psalm is that dwelling in the presence of God is expressed in terms of character.

[8 : 58] That's why we get this character description. Where Psalm 15 shows us the kind of character that is required to have access to God. And as we read this from verse 2 to verse 5, we're left asking ourselves, well, do I match up to the character that is described here?

Because if I don't, then I'm not qualified to enter into God's presence. And yet the good news is that there is one who fully did everything required, and that's Jesus Christ.

His wholehearted worship, his life of perfect obedience means that Jesus alone can meet these requirements.

And so it's only in him and through him that we can have access to God. And so by way of application of this message to what we're thinking about in terms of membership of the church,

Psalm 15 actually answers the question, what makes you a member of the church?

Because the basic answer is being a Christian, being a follower of Jesus, having faith in Jesus, being a Christian makes you a member of Christ's church.

[10:16] Because our union with Jesus Christ means that we belong to the universal church, the global church. And so we should never lose sight of the simple fact that everybody who confesses Jesus as Savior and Lord is a member of his church.

In a couple of weeks, we're having some new members join Christ's church Glasgow. And you don't need to do a whole load of stuff to be a member of a church.

You need to believe in Jesus Christ. And that's why being a member of the local church is not about adding something to what it means to be saved.

It simply formalizes it for those of us who follow Jesus. So there's a clear question, first of all.

Secondly, there's an impossible answer here in verse 2 to verse 5.

Now the bulk of Psalm 2 to 5, which is verse 2 to 5, basically is answering the question that's raised in verse 1. And when you read it, you see that it's actually an impossible answer.

[11:24] Because it's this character description of the one who may enter God's presence. And the list here, I don't think it's meant to be an exhaustive list. But I think there are 10 discernible requirements in this character sketch.

So it's not a 10 point sermon. But between verse 2 and 5, if you don't go by the verse numbers and go by the phrases, there are 10 requirements in this character sketch.

And they're all ethical requirements concerned with living the right way and conducting relationships in the right way.

And they demand integrity as well as sincerity. And they denounce hypocrisy. And you'll notice that they move between speech and behaviour, between lip and life.

And so let's look at these 10 characteristics that qualify a person for the presence of God. So they must be, I'll run through them and then we'll look at each briefly. They must be, number 1, one who walks blamelessly.

[12:31] Number 2, one who does what is righteous. Number 3, one who speaks the truth from the heart. Number 4, one who utters no slander.

Number 5, one who does no wrong to a neighbour. Number 6, one who casts no slur on others.

Number 7, one who despises a vile person but honours those who fear the Lord.

Number 8, one who keeps an oath even when it hurts. Number 9, one who charges no interest. And number 10, one who accepts no bribes. Okay, so verse 2.

The one whose way of life is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart. These are the first three requirements. Now, verse 2 is basically like an executive summary of all that will follow of everything else.

Because it describes one whose way of life is blameless. Now, can you just imagine for one moment having never done or said or thought anything wrong past?

[13:41] And never doing or saying or thinking anything wrong? It's hard to imagine, isn't it? It's impossible. Number 2, one who does what is righteous.

So the focus here is on doing what is right on every occasion. Have you ever done what is right on every occasion? Number 3, one who speaks the truth from the heart.

The focus here is on saying what is right on every occasion. How good would it be to be able to say the right thing every time?

That would be fantastic. But nobody is able to do it. No lies, no half-truths, no evasive speech, no vagueness, no white lies, no deception.

And this truth speaking is expounded upon in the next three requirements. So verse 3 says, The one whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbour and casts no slur on others.

[14:43] So the fourth requirement, one who utters no slander. Meaning there's never a false word spoken against somebody else.

No harmful or hurtful comments are ever made. There is no character assassination. What would it be like to be able to speak in that way?

Number 5, one who does no wrong to a neighbour. From verse 3, the phrase focuses on treating everybody in exactly the right way.

Where no wrong is ever done to anybody else. And loving one's neighbour as oneself is always done to everybody. Number 6, one who casts no slur on others.

This is speaking of personally attacking somebody else by spreading false rumours, by shaming them, by seeking to destroy their reputation. So no damaging somebody's good name with gossip.

[15 : 46] The next, there are more requirements on the treatment of others. So number 7 from verse 4, One who despises a vile person, but honours those who fear the Lord.

This phrase is emphasising allegiance to the Lord. Where the fear of the Lord is giving God proper awe and reverence and respect.

Which results in responding to others based on their fear of the Lord. So despising what is wrong and honouring what is good. Where the vile person is despised, whereas the person who fears the Lord is honoured.

And then number 8, this is the middle of verse 4. One who keeps an oath even when it hurts. This is speaking of trustworthiness. Of honouring commitments and keeping vows.

Whether they be big or small. Who of us has always honoured our commitments and kept our vows, made a promise and done exactly what we've promised? Nobody.

[16 : 49] So speaking here of firmly sticking to your word. Of not changing your mind, even if it's going to be costly. And then the last two requirements are about money.

So verse 5. And the ninth requirement is one who charges no interest. So speaking about lending generously to the poor without expecting interest.

Otherwise it's exploitation and it's abuse of power. Because it disadvantages the poor while enriching the lender. So number 9 and 10 here are against greed and against covetousness.

That's the final requirement. Verse 5 in the middle is the tenth one. The tenth one which is no one accepts, sorry, one who accepts no bribes.

So speaking about absolute honesty in all of our dealings with people. Bribes are deceitful and unjust as we know.

[17 : 48] Because they use or abuse others in the hope of personal gain. And so these final two requirements actually reflect the character of God himself.

They all do. Because God is a God of generous justice. So these ten requirements are here. And so the question from verse 1 is, Who may approach God and dwell with him?

And the answer is, well, if you meet these ten requirements, then you may approach God and dwell with him. But it's an impossible answer, isn't it?

Because these requirements simply show up just how far short we fall. Especially since they reflect the character of God himself. They set out this impossible standard that none of us can ever attain. Whether it's walking blamelessly or living righteously or speaking truthfully. We know we've never managed to do any of those things.

[18 : 52] And we don't just simply fall at every hurdle. We actually stumble at every single step. And so the psalm is exposing how impossible it is for us to live this way.

Now sometimes we might manage it on a good day or a good hour or a good minute. We might manage it. But most of the time we don't.

We can't manage it 100%, 100% all the time. There is no way. And even if we try our best, we still end up in despair and in ruins.

Because we cannot meet these requirements. But failure to meet these requirements, the psalm is saying to us, excludes us from the very presence of God.

It creates a problem. Because these entrance requirements highlight that only moral perfection, absolute purity, blindingly clear holiness is the only thing that will make us acceptable to God and fit for his presence and able to dwell with him.

[20 : 05] So it's not that the psalm has got it wrong in what it requires. The point is, we are the ones who have got it wrong. Because it states the character of life God requires from us, but shows us that we don't possess it.

And we never will, no matter how hard we try. The Holy God cannot have sinful human beings in his presence.

Nobody can meet the requirements of Psalm 15. Nobody can match this character sketch. No one, of course, except one. And that is Jesus Christ.

And so let's move on from a clear question to an impossible answer to thirdly, a solid promise.

Because that's how Psalm 15 concludes. It concludes with a solid promise. Look at the end of verse

5.

Whoever does these things will never be shaken. That's a promise for the one who keeps the requirements. It's saying they will never be shaken.

[21 : 08] It's the promise of security in this world right now, but also security in the world to come. And it's the ultimate answer to the opening question of the Psalm, indicating that the only safe place in this world, in life, the only safe place after death and what's next is in God's presence.

But the promise, of course, only applies to the one who does these things. So these things meaning all the requirements that have just been outlined.

But we said there's only one, one person alone who has done all of these things, and that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it's clear that this Psalm, as is the case with every single Psalm when you read the Psalter, they all point forwards to Jesus and they're all fulfilled in Jesus.

Because Jesus alone has perfectly satisfied the things, the requirements that are listed here, to be able to dwell in God's presence.

And so if you remember the life of Jesus, as soon as Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened and the Spirit of God descended on him. And a voice came from heaven and said, This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

[22 : 39] And then Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience. So he could be the perfect sacrifice for his people. And so what the Psalm is pointing us towards is that it takes nothing less than the perfect life and the death of the Son of God to give you and I access to God and into his presence.

Where on the cross Jesus died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. Because 2 Corinthians 5 tells us, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So the New Testament is telling us that we are unrighteous, we can never gain access to God, but in Christ we become the righteousness of God. Because everyone united to Christ by faith receives his righteousness.

And that's the only thing that can give the security that this Psalm ends with. And so it's saying the only safe place where we will never be shaken in life or in death is in God's presence through our union with Jesus Christ.

So Jesus, the Son of God, finally answers the question that David asks in verse 1. How is it answered? Well, it's answered by his perfect life.

[24 : 16] It's answered by his substitutionary death. It's answered by his glorious resurrection. And it's answered by his powerful ascension. So if you just think back to the Psalms that we've already looked at in this series, looking at our vision for Christ Church Glasgow.

Psalm 1. Psalm 1. Jesus, you remember, is the righteous man of Psalm 1. And Jesus is the righteous man who's lived out. Psalm 15, which we're looking at today.

And in Psalm 2, Jesus is the King who has ascended the holy mountain of God's presence, where he now sits at the Father's right hand.

And all of this Jesus has done for us. And so I gave this sermon the title, the question, who'd make a good guest in God's house?

And the answer is clear. None of us. It's impossible apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the perfect guest. Jesus has the perfect behavior.

[25 : 23] He has met all the requirements for access. Jesus has basically kept the house rules, as it were. He's done it all for you and for me.

And so we get into God's house, into God's presence, not based on our own merit, but the good news is we get in through the merit of Jesus Christ.

And not just so we can be a guest in God's house. Being a guest is nice. But Jesus has done this so we can become a part of God's family.

That's different to being a guest, isn't it? Just being part of the family. Because Jesus enables us to dwell with God as his adopted sons and daughters.

Where we're not only accepted by God, but our lives are conformed to the image of his son, Jesus. And so the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, whereby we increasingly display the characteristics of Psalm 15.

[26 : 32] One commentator puts this well, Derek Kidner, he says, The qualities of the Psalm describes are those that God creates in a man, not those he finds in him.

And then Charles Spurgeon, the Baptist preacher says, Spiritually, we have here a description of the man who is a child at home in the church of God on earth, and who will dwell in the house of the Lord forever above.

He is primarily Jesus, the perfect man, and in him all who through grace are conformed to his image. So you know that becoming a Christian means that God's grace transforms your heart. And when your heart is transformed, then your desires change. And we become in character what we are in status.

We become what we are. So in Christ we are declared righteous by God. And then in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives, working in their lives, we become more of what we should be.

[27 : 41] More righteous in our living, in our speech, in our actions. And so our behavior and speech become more of what they should be. Because we realize Jesus has given us his righteousness.

Then we want to live a righteous life, as verse 2 says, The one who does what is righteous. And we need this as individuals, don't we?

Our lives need to be marked with holiness. We need to be more like Jesus. How good would it be for our spouses and our children and our colleagues and our church family, if we were simply more like Jesus?

So we need it for ourselves, but we need it for a corporate life too, as a church. Because as we become more like Jesus in our relationships with one another, then so we display the beauty of Jesus to the world around us.

That's the heart of what it means to be a member of Christ's church. It doesn't just mean doing a whole load more of stuff. So don't take the application as, Jonathan is going to be right after me with a rota for me to put my name on it.

[28 : 56] And sign up to it, to do this every month or every week. No. The heart of what it means to be a member of Christ's church is to be more like Jesus.

Because when we're more like Jesus, then we'll want to live like Jesus and serve and obey. And when we're a member of a church, we actually are helped to be more like Jesus by being around Jesus' people.

And we're also used to help others become more like Jesus, if we are like Jesus ourselves. And this is how God has designed the church to be.

This is how he wants it to happen, that together we make each other more like Jesus. So being part of a church or being a Christian, it's not about being a solo believer.

It's not some kind of isolated activity where all that really matters is Jesus and me. It's all about Jesus and me. No, of course not. And that's why church membership has responsibilities as well as blessings and privileges.

[30 : 05] And so when we take our membership vows, of course we don't do so lightly. We're saying and taking membership vows that we are serious about living for Jesus and living like Jesus for the sake of proclaiming Jesus to the world.

We're expressing our desire to dwell in God's presence now. And we have a foretaste of it in the church before the reality and the new creation.

And we're promising that we will be, in becoming a member of the church, we're promising that we'll be regular in attending worship. We'll be faithful in Bible reading and prayer.

We'll be willing to give our time and our talents and our treasures to God's work. And we'll be ready to accept spiritual guidance, even discipline if we need it, in order to make us more like Jesus.

Why wouldn't you want to be part of such a body as this? Because if we want to be a good citizen of God's kingdom, then we need to be a member of Christ's church on earth.

[31 : 19] Let's pray together.