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Psalms 14; 15

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We're going through the psalms slowly but surely. Tonight we're going to take two short psalms, not just one. Psalm 14 and 15, continuing with the first division of the psalms, which are the first 42 psalms. So far we've just covered psalms of David except for the first psalm which is not identified as to authorship.

I'm calling these two psalms "Excluded or Included." The one psalm, Psalm 14, deals with a person who is excluded from God's presence. Psalm 15 deals with a person who dwells in His tent or is included.

Both of them are psalms of David; neither is linked to any particular incident in his life so we don't know what particular moment—whether he was young or old or middle age—whenever he wrote them. We cannot locate a particular incidence.

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. Will evildoers never learn—those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD? There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous. You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!" (Psalm 14:1–7, NIV).

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Psalm 14 is the psalm of the fool, the person who is excluded from God's presence. This psalm is almost exactly duplicated; Psalm 53 is almost word for word a copy of Psalm 14. When we get to Psalm 53 down the road we'll consider it already covered. So actually I guess we're taking three psalms tonight—Psalm 14, Psalm 53, Psalm 15.

The differences between 14 and 53, primarily: Psalm 14 uses the covenant word for God—*Yahweh*. Psalm 53 uses the general, more generic term for God—*Elohim*. Then there is a little bit of difference at the end of the fifth verse and the beginning of the sixth verse. They're slightly reworded. But basically they're the same.

What I'd guess happened is when a minister repeats a sermon. It's essentially the same but there's maybe a different twist at the end because you're facing a different situation. I've done that. Or a person singing a song. But the truth is the same.

The word that sort of epitomizes Psalm 14 is the word "fool." It is not a word like we in the English language use the word. The Hebrew word for fool is the word *nabal*. There's a man in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 25, whose name is Nabal, literally a "fool." His wife Abigail at a particular moment reminds him of the meaning of his name. Nabal was a rather wealthy landowner. David was at that time having his problems with Saul. David's men had been in an area where Nabal's sheep and goats had been and they had protected his property from any loss. There came a time when David sent messengers to Nabal saying, "Would you give us some food so our men can eat?" Nabal turned down the request cold and with some very cutting remarks. His wife Abigail is so concerned that Nabal has burned his bridges with David and David is going to wipe him out that she mounts a donkey and goes to meet David to stay David's wrath. When she meets him she says this, "May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He

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is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him” (1 Samuel 25:25, NIV). It’s surprising that when Nabal dies, Abigail marries David.

Nabal is a fool. Why is he a fool? 1 Samuel 25 gives us four characteristics of a fool and those four characteristics are those that summarize what it means to be a fool in Psalm 14. This “fool” first of all spurned David’s good intentions toward him. And a fool in regard to God is spurning God’s good intentions. God is offering us the gift of His presence, the gift of eternal life. The fool turns down the offer.

The second way he is a fool is he does not take opportunity to thank David for protecting this sheep and goats. David had done him good and the fool, again in reference to God, does not find occasion in his life to thank God for the gift of life itself. Paul picks up on this in Romans 1 about the person who is a practicing atheist. He says “They neither acknowledge God nor gave Him thanks. Therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” Romans 1 is really an exposition; 1:18–32 is really an exposition of Psalm 14. It develops the concept of the fool in a much greater depth.

The third reason Nabal was a fool was he did not recognize that David could exact more than he was willing to take as a gift. David could have wiped out everything that belonged to the guy but David was willing to take a little. Therefore he is not wise as a fool in being prudent.

Then the fourth reason was he insulted David by comparing him to a rebellious rabble rather than treating him to the dignity and honor which he merited.

The fool therefore is both a theoretical and a practical atheist. Remember a few psalms ago I made a distinction between theoretical atheists who may on the surface be very moral and practical atheists who may ever confess a creed but who in their life live as if there is no God and their behavior never shows a shred of evidence that they believe in God.

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The fool is saying there is no God and in so saying reveals his or her own corruptness, because God can be known. Scripture says in Romans 1 that God is both known in the creation and in the conscience. The last word on atheism is said in Psalm 14, and in Romans 1:19–25, which in essence says, “Claiming to be wise they became fools, for what can be known about God is plain to them and they did not see fit to acknowledge God.”

I. Psalm 14 itself is divided into five parts.

A. The first part is the human folly, verse 1. The human folly is self-talk and wrong actions characterize the fool. The fool therefore is not someone who is intellectually deficient but who is morally deficient. The fool in the Hebrew sense is not the person who is educationally handicapped. The fool is one who is morally bankrupt and therefore this fool says in his bankruptcy, “There is no God.” Kind of as a result of his self-talk his actions are corrupt and his deeds are vile.

To say there is no God is immorality all by itself. We normally think of immorality as something you do wrong with another person. But according the Psalm 14 definition, immorality in its basic essence is denying the existence of God. The assertion that there is no God is therefore treated in Scripture not as some sincere conviction but as an irresponsible gesture of defiance. Human folly.

B. The second part of this psalm is the divine examination. Psalm 14:2 says, “God looks down on the sons of man to see if any understand or seek God.” God is looking and God looks earnestly. His radical verdict is that man has a basic inability to do what is right in accordance with God’s desires. It’s not that man doesn’t do some good deeds now and then. We misjudge the atheist if we assume he isn’t capable of a good deed now and then. But from God’s point of view goodness is to live life in away that is in total conformity to the design that God had in

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creating us. Therefore God sees that the person who is denying His existence is in his or her own life not conforming to the standard of goodness that God has created us with. So God finds all lacking.

C. The divine conclusion, verse 3, the third part of the psalm. “All have turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good, not even one.”

Paul picks this up and quotes this in Romans 3 after he has dealt with the need of the non-Jewish world and the Jewish world for God. Paul is dealing with the theme of condemnation—why the world needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s because no one can stand on their own before God. He has three basic sections to that condemnation:

One, the non-Jewish world through the corruption of their own conscience lives in such a way as to deny the existence of God.

Two, the Jewish person, the religious person who is saying, “I’m right with God for keeping the Torah,” shows that they themselves do not keep the Torah they proclaim. No religious group is immune from sin and from acting in a way that is inconsistent with what they believe. Paul says if you’re relying on religion and ethic and morality to get you into the kingdom of God then he traces the sins of the moral person.

Then he comes to the great conclusion in Romans 3. Over and over again he sounds the note: there is no one who does right.

D. An atheist group has yet to build a noble nation. Without God, man rots. Without God, society rots. God’s indictment is “Together they become corrupt.”

Divine indictment, verses 4–5, against the atheist is threefold. The atheist mistreats God’s people. “They devour my people as men eat bread.” God has decided not to move against evil until He does it all at once. We might say, “Lord, why don’t You punish people for what they’re

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doing wrong?” The problem is if the Lord does that then He’s going to move unilaterally against all evil. All across the board. God is delaying His judgment.

In the meantime we’re salt and light. God isn’t going to act dramatically with the people all around. He’s going to use us as His agents of His message to give people the chance to change, to reform.

Then the divine indictment also shows a sense of approaching doom because they’re overwhelmed with dread. There are moments in the middle of the night when a person wakes up who’s tried everything, but they haven’t tried God.

Also there’s oppression of the poor. Corruption of man is seen on how he downtrods the poor. Christians and godly people are always on the side of the weak and helping those who need the help.

That’s not to say that every atheist is downtrodding the poor but a common characteristic of people who have put self on the throne and denied God is oppression of other people.

What a tremendous difference this is from Psalm 8, the celebration of the glory of man. Being made a little less than God. “What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4, NIV). There in Psalm 8 we have the picture of the ideal man, the original man. Here in Psalm 14, the actual man. The Bible represents man in his humanity in his grandeur. But also recognizes him in his deep degradation. So there is this divine indictment, verses 4–5.

E. Then there is the divine remedy, verse 7. “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion” (NIV). The world will not be renewed by philosophy or by education. Our problems are not mental, they’re moral. It will not be brought by institutions, for they can only bring external change. David is looking for salvation from God, from out of Zion. He’s looking for a Redeemer, a Deliverer to come.

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If we're treating this psalm from the New Testament sense we would say that Zion today is the church which bears witness to Jesus Christ. Out of the witness of God's people comes a testimony to Christ. When David looks to God for help his faith immediately is activated. In this last verse of the psalm we see that God's judgment is not His last word. His grace is even greater. He will restore the fortunes of His people. He will provide them a new foundation. God is not wanting to pronounce guilt upon the human race. He is wanting to give grace. So even though the atheist has said there is no God, the psalm concludes not with God's judgment on the atheist but with the announcement that the hope of the world and the hope for the atheist is that God's Deliverer will come. It's a beautiful way to end a statement in the psalm that has begun with condemnation and concludes with grace.

II. That leads us into the next psalm, which is a deliberate contrast.

These two psalms I think are meant to be together because they're two sides of the coin. The one is excluded, the other is included.

“LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary [tent, the tabernacle in the wilderness]? Who may live on your holy hill [Mount Zion]? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken” (Psalm 15:1–5, NIV).

A. You can see that this psalm begins with two questions. They're parallel questions, two ways of phrasing the same thing. Neither the hill nor the tent could be lived in by a person. A person couldn't go live in the tabernacle. And certainly a person didn't live on Mount Zion where the

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temple came to be located. Those places were restricted. They were holy. They were limited access. Priests could visit them. In the Holy of Holies a priest once a year could go into, in the Holy Place the priest once in the morning and once in the evening could go into. But they were off limits for living.

Why does David want to live in God's tent? The tabernacle. He's saying that would be the ideal condition, to be accepted into God's presence and not be excluded any more. Since the writer of Hebrews tells us that earthly things are a copy of heavenly things, what David is doing is looking in spirit to the day ahead when he can dwell eternally in God's presence. What are the qualifications for living in God's presence? That's the thrust of the first verse, to get us into the answer to that question.

B. Verses 2–5 answer the question by starting out “He whose walk is blameless.” That's really the key phrase. All the characteristics that flow after that phrase are delineations of what it means to be blameless. There are ten qualities of blamelessness that are given. The word “blameless” in the Hebrew is a word which covers a broad area. It can be translated “perfect” or it signifies a completeness. That is to say a many-sided, well-rounded pattern of living which leaves no important area of life uncultivated. A person who is well-rounded in godliness and there is no weed patch in your life.

The blameless person then is articulated as having ten qualities. It's a teaching psalm as for a child. He wants someone who's righteous. No lies, he speaks the truth... Ten basic qualities of the blameless person.

The great thing that Christ does for us is He immediately declares us righteous. That gives us room to treat these qualities as developmental. We do not immediately have all in our life in the full state of actualization. They're all there potentially but we haven't actualized them all. We're

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not yet living up to the optimum on all of them. But because God has accepted us in His tent because of Christ we can treat these as developmental and not walk away from Psalm 15 condemned and believing, “I’ll never live in God’s tent. I haven’t made it.” Christ has made it possible. Know these are the things we’re to develop. These are the things we’re to shoot for. This is what God wants in our life. This is a chance to be in God’s inner circle, in His tent.

“Does what is righteous” (Psalm 15:2, NIV); acts straight and true; can be counted on to do what is right.

“Speaks the truth from his heart” (verse 2, NIV). Right attitude and conduct will find its way into the words of our mouth. It’s easy to talk about what is righteous and keep our speech straight rather than crooked.

“No slander on his tongue” (verse 3, NIV). Four of these qualities have to do with speech. To slander a person means to spy things out and spread them around. To defame somebody. The psalmist is saying no mouth can bless God in worship and then slander a fellow person in the next breath.

“Does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman” (verse 3, NIV). Very close to the third quality of not having slander. To cast a slur is to pick up something discreditable and rack it up unnecessarily. All of us know stuff about people we don’t need to share. It may be true but it doesn’t need to be shared. I think it has to do with where the person is in their life. If they are openly treading on the grace of God and trying to pass themselves for the sake of monetary gain in the body of Christ then that person, their deeds of darkness, need to be exposed. There is a time I think the Holy Spirit helps you to know when to expose and when to cover up.

“Despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD” (verse 4, NIV). What the person is doing is not comparing himself with others but declaring what we admire and where we stand.

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Will we choose to honor a vile man and despise those who fear the Lord? Or despise the vile man and honor those who fear the Lord?

“Keeps his oath even when it hurts” (verse 4, NIV). Keeps his word. One check on a righteous person—do they keep their word? Or are they careless? People who are careless about their commitments don’t respect themselves. They don’t believe their own word; when they give you their word they don’t keep it themselves. That is a mark of disrespect for self. Secondly, it’s a mark of disrespect for God in terms of speaking truth. If we give our word, Proverbs 6 says, and we want to get out of it, we’re to go to the person and ask if we can get out of it. Most of the promises we make can be kept. And what can’t be we need to ask permission to get out of them.

“Lends his money without usury” (verse 5, NIV). Money at interest is condemned in the Bible. Not in general because Deuteronomy 23:20 tells the people they could charge interest. But taking of interest or usury was forbidden in the context of having a poor person who was going through a hard time and they come to you. When you’ve got to borrow money for your operating expenses you’re in trouble. The poor come for help and any interest was gain. The Bible says you cannot use tough times to take advantage of people who are poor.

“Does not accept a bribe” (verse 5, NIV). The person who is blameless does not accept a bribe. He cannot be perverted for money’s sake.

What happens to this kind of person? “He who does these things will never be shaken” (verse 5, NIV). In other words the psalm begins by saying, “Who gets into God’s tent?” And it ends up by saying, “If you’ll do these things you’ll not only get into God’s tent but they’ll never kick you out.”

Christ obviously has done all these things. So our righteousness is first of all found in Him.

Security does not come by siding with the strong. But by steadfast trust in the Lord. He will not

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be moved. We cannot be shaken from our place in God either by temptation or by adversity because we have chosen to identify with God. Psalm 10:6, “Nothing will shake me; I’ll always be happy and never have trouble” (NIV). A wicked man says that in Psalm 10:6, but the righteous can say it if they’re dwelling in God’s tent: “Nothing will shake me. I’ll always be happy.”

Closing Prayer

Praise Your name, Lord. Thank You for Your word. You’re looking down from heaven even tonight seeking persons who will follow after You with their whole heart. As You turn Your eyes toward each one of us we’re so glad that You see in us the character and personality and righteousness of Your Son; not of our own merit do we stand in Your presence but through Christ. We’re so glad that the Holy Spirit is in us, causing us to conform to Your character and we won’t be shaken either. In days of trouble and times of stress and tests we’ll be there dwelling in Your tent, secure. No matter what kind of a world we’re living in. No matter what we look up at night from our bed and see. No matter what our residence. Our real home is in You. In You we’ll dwell secure. Help us, Lord, to always be included in Your presence rather than excluded. We ask in Your name. Amen.