

# KENWOOD

## BULLETIN

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### The Righteousness of the King in Psalm 15

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It was recently my privilege to preach Psalm 15 to a midweek gathering of the saints at Kenwood Baptist Church at Victory Memorial. I believe the main point of Psalm 15 to be an implicit exhortation to the people of God to follow in the steps of our king, who keeps covenant with the Lord and judges righteously, in order to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

David opens the psalm with a twofold rhetorical question – who may sojourn in God’s tent and dwell on his holy mountain? Together the tent and mountain images refer to the place of the Lord’s special presence typified by the garden in Eden, the pinnacle of Mt. Sinai, and the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and temple and to be fulfilled in Mount Zion, the new heavens and the new earth. The answer to David’s question, then, is the king, the royal priest, his future seed, the one whom the Lord will call “Son” and who will serve as his faithful covenantal counterpart – he is the one who may ascend God’s mountain (Ps 24:3) and stand in his presence (Ps 24:3; cf. Ps 1:5).

The Lord is holy and evil cannot dwell with him (Ps 5:4), so this future Davidic king is the only one who meets the requirements to dwell with the Lord and who is thus invited in. The remainder of the psalm focuses on these requirements, which are organized into a threefold positive summary of covenantal faithfulness, two groups of three negatives that frame the king’s righteous judgment as the center of the psalm, and then a concluding promise of permanence.

Covenantal faithfulness is described in verse 2 as a blameless manner of life in accordance with the Torah (cf. Ps 119:1), righteous judgment with respect to others, and a life devoid of hypocrisy in which what is spoken flows out of a heart devoted to the Lord (cf. Matt 12:34; Luke 6:45). The king who may dwell with the Lord is a wholly righteous covenantal counterpart whose life inside and out is characterized by faithfulness to the Word of God and love for neighbor.

Righteous judgment, then, is further expounded in the two sets of three negatives that frame the center of the psalm where David writes, “Despised in his eyes is one rejected, but those who

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fear YHWH he honors” (Ps 15:4). David here describes just royal judgment—a separation between the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:36–43), a distinction between the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46)—which together with verse 1 frames the entire psalm with reference to eschatological judgment with implications for the lives of the people of God now. A “vile/rejected person” is despised in the Lord’s eyes because he has rejected the Lord and his ways (cf. 1 Sam 15:23, 26). Those who “fear the Lord,” on the other hand, are those who keep his commandments, those who obey him (cf. Eccl 12:13). These two lines are arranged chiastically with the two types of people in the center and the king’s righteous judgment of each at the beginning and end, which emphasizes that each one of us will either be despised or honored by the king who dwells on the Lord’s holy mountain and who does righteousness.

The first set of three negatives (v. 3) concerns manner of life with neighbors in close proximity. The righteous king does not slander, do evil, or cause public shame to those close to him. In short, he loves his neighbor as himself, thus fulfilling the whole law (Gal 5:14). The second set of three negatives (v. 4–5) alludes to Deuteronomic requirements for covenantal obedience to the Lord manifest in neighbor love. The righteous king never reneges on a vow even if it is costly to him (Deut 23:21), he does not financially oppress those around him (Deut 23:19), and he never accepts bribes (Deut 16:19). These two sets of three negatives that frame righteous judgment, therefore, consist of general prohibitions regarding love for neighbor and specific prohibitions from the law of God giving full-orbed expression to what it means for the king to “do righteousness.”

It is the true king, the Son of David, who does these things. It is the king who is fit to enter and remain in the presence of the Lord, and that forever, as verse 5 states. Deuteronomy 16:20 says, “Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” David himself, and the future idealized king he is presenting here, wants one thing—to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and he knows that’s where he is headed, as he sings in Psalm 61:4, “I will sojourn in your tent permanently.” The righteous king and his people will never be moved (Prov 10:30). David also knows that permanence in the Lord’s presence requires royal law keeping—covenant faithfulness. We can praise the Lord together for our king, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, who fulfills these requirements and has ascended to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

But David knows, and we know, the truth about ourselves. We don’t even approach living up to these requirements. What hope is there for sinners to sojourn in the Lord’s tent and never be moved?

The testimony of the Lord to Isaac about his father, Abraham, was that Abraham obeyed the law of God (Gen 26:2–5). Not only did Abraham not have the law of God, but even a cursory overview of the Genesis narratives reveals that Abraham was just like us—he failed to live up to what God said about him.

The key is Genesis 15:6, which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” By faith, Abraham received the testimony of law-keeper, faithful covenant

keeper, the righteousness required to ascend God's hill. The same is true for us today, for according to Paul in Philippians 3 our righteousness as Christians is a gift from God on the basis of faith in the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus is our king, the Son of David (Matt 1:1), who has faithfully kept covenant with God and opened the way to stand in his presence permanently. It falls to us to follow in his steps, to walk just as he walked, which is best expressed in our love for one another.

Two complementary applications for us from this text are as follows:

First, do not make the mistake of reading Psalm 15 and thinking that if *you* do these things – if you live a life characterized by blamelessness, righteousness, and wholeness – *you* can merit entrance into God's presence, *you* can meet God's righteous requirements. You cannot. The more we try, the more we minimize our own sin and maximize the sin of others, ending up as whitewashed tombs like the Pharisees. To receive the testimony that Abraham received, we must trust in the Word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ, our king who has kept covenant for us. Who can sojourn in God's tent, ascend and dwell in his holy hill, and stand in the judgment? Only Jesus and those united to him by faith.

Second, do not make the mistake of reading Psalm 15 and thinking that it doesn't matter if *you* do these things. As an expression of our professed faith, we must follow in the steps of our king. We must know the law of the Lord and do it as James exhorts us (Jas 1:22-25). We must work out what the Lord works in us as Paul wrote to the Philippians (Phil 2:12-13). Abraham's faith was confirmed by his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son in obedience to the Lord with unwavering faith that God's Word would be fulfilled (Jas 2:21-24).

What confirms your faith? May Christians be a people who look like our king – faithful, dependable, and loving one another.