

Psalm 15: Truth in public life



Psalm 15 (14) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

The psalmist is seeking to be close to God and is reflecting on the way we must live if we want to enjoy this closeness.

Psalm 15 is modelled on the decalogue in that it recognises the primary place of our relationship with God as the context within which we should relate to our neighbour, while also recognising that our relationship with our neighbour is the test of the truth of our relationship with God.

For other statements of the necessary link between the religion and justice see especially Isaiah 1:10-20; Jeremiah 7; Micah 6:6-8.

The ethical demands put forward by the psalmist are still relevant today, when public discourse is often used to shore up political power or economic interest with little regard for the truth, and when economic power serves the self-interest of the rich with little regard for the common good.

Lord, who can be a guest in your tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

The Lord dwelt in a tent as he journeyed through the desert with his people (see 2Samuel 7:6).

It was in this tent that Moses experienced intimate communion with the Lord (see Exodus 33:11).

‘One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple’(Psalm 27:4).

Anna lived her days in God’s temple (Luke 2:37).

‘Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup’(1Corinthians 11:27-28).

‘Christ has reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before God’(Colossians 1:22).

‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.’

(Romans 12:1-2)

‘We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal human being, has set up’(Hebrews 8:1-2).

‘When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come ... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption’(Hebrews 9:11-12).

‘Since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’(Hebrews 10:19-22).

Worship has ethical demands

‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? ... He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’(Micah 6:6-8).

‘Those who walk righteously and speak uprightly, who despise the gain of oppression, who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it, who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking on evil, will live on the heights; their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks; their food will be supplied, their water assured’(Isaiah 33:15-16).

Lord, who can be a guest in your tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

The person whose lives with integrity,

‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

(Matthew 5:48).

who does what is right,

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.’

(Matthew 5:6).

‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord,Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven’(Matthew 7:21).

who does what is right,
who speaks the truth with courage.

‘The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks’(Luke 6:45).

Such people do not spread slander,
or abuse their friends,
or cast a slur
against a neighbour.

They find offensive
those not approved by God,
and honour those
who live their faith in the Lord.

They stand by their word,
whatever the cost.

When they lend
they do not seek interest.

They do not accept a bribe
to condemn the innocent.

These are the just.

They stand firm for ever.

Psalm 15 is echoed in the following from the Isaiah scroll (Isaiah 33:14-16).

‘Who among us can live with the devouring fire?
Who among us can live with everlasting flames?
Those will live on the heights
who walk righteously and speak uprightly,
who despise the gain of oppression,
who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it,
who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed
and shut their eyes from looking on evil.
Their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks,
their food will be supplied, their water assured.’