

PSALM 15

The scope of this short but excellent psalm is to show us the way to heaven, and to convince us that, if we would be happy, we must be holy and honest. Christ, who is himself the way, and in whom we must walk as our way, has also shown us the same way that is here prescribed, ~~<BIB>~~ Matthew 19:17. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” In this psalm,

I. By the question (v. 1) we are directed and excited to enquire for the way.

II. By the answer to that question, in the rest of the psalm, we are directed to walk in that way (v. 2-5).

III. By the assurance given in the close of the psalm of the safety and happiness of those who answer these characters we are encouraged to walk in that way (v. 5).

~~<BIB>~~ PSALM 15:1-5

THE CITIZEN OF ZION

A psalm of David.

Here is,

I. A very serious and weighty question concerning the characters of a citizen of Zion (v. 1): “*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?* Let me know who shall go to heaven.” Not, who by name (in this way the *Lord* only knows those that are his), but who by description: “What kind of people are those whom thou wilt own and crown with distinguishing and everlasting favours?” This supposes that it is a great privilege to be a citizen of Zion, an unspeakable honour and advantage, — that all are not thus privileged, but a remnant only, — and that men are not entitled to this privilege by their birth and blood: all shall not *abide in God's tabernacle* that have Abraham to their father, but, according as men's hearts and lives are, so will their lot be. It concerns us all to put this question to ourselves, *Lord, what shall I be, and do, that I may abide in thy tabernacle?* ~~<BIB>~~ Luke 18:18; ~~<BIB>~~ Acts 16:30.

1. Observe to whom this enquiry is addressed — to God himself. Note, Those that would find the way to heaven must look up to God, must take direction from his word and beg direction from his Spirit. It is fit he himself should give laws to his servants, and appoint the conditions of his favours, and tell who are his and who not.

2. How it is expressed in Old-Testament language.

(1.) By the *tabernacle* we may understand the church militant, typified by Moses's tabernacle, fitted to a wilderness-state, mean and movable. There God manifests himself, and there he meets his people, as of old in the tabernacle of the testimony, the tabernacle of meeting. Who shall dwell in this tabernacle? Who shall be accounted a true living member of God's church, admitted among the spiritual priests to lodge in the courts of this tabernacle? We are concerned to enquire this, because many pretend to a place in this tabernacle who really have no part nor lot in the matter.

(2.) By the *holy hill* we may understand the church triumphant, alluding to Mount Zion, on which the temple was to be built by Solomon. It is the happiness of glorified saints that they dwell in that holy hill; they are at home there: they shall be for ever there. It concerns us to know who shall dwell there, that we may make it sure to ourselves that we shall have a place among them, and may then take the comfort of it, and rejoice in prospect of that holy hill.

II. A very plain and particular answer to this question. Those that desire to know their duty, with a resolution to do it, will find the scripture a very faithful director and conscience a faithful monitor. Let us see then the particular characters of a citizen of Zion.

1. He is one that is sincere and entire in his religion: He *walketh uprightly*, according to the condition of the covenant (^{AMT}Genesis 17:1), “*Walk before me, and be thou perfect*” (it is the same word that is here used) “and then thou shalt find me a God all-sufficient.” He is really what he professes to be, is sound at heart, and can approve himself to God, in his integrity, in all he does; his conversation is uniform, and he is of a piece with himself, and endeavours to stand complete in all the will of God. His eye perhaps is weak, but it is single; he has his spots indeed, but he does not paint; he is an *Israelite indeed in whom is no guile*, ^{RLD}John 1:47; ^{AMT}2 Corinthians 1:12. I know no religion but sincerity.

2. He is one that is conscientiously honest and just in all his dealings, faithful and fair to all with whom he has to do: He *worketh righteousness*; he walks in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord, and takes care to give all their due, is just both to God and man; and, in speaking to both, he speaks that which is *the truth in his heart*; his prayers, professions, and promises, to God, come not out of feigned lips, nor dares he tell a lie, or so much as equivocate, in his converse or commerce with men. He walks by the rules of righteousness and truth, and scorns and abhors the gains of injustice and fraud. He reckons that that cannot be a good bargain, nor a saving one, which is made with a lie, and that he who wrongs his neighbour, though ever so plausibly, will prove, in the end, to have done the greatest injury to himself.

3. He is one that contrives to do all the good he can to his neighbours, but is very careful to do hurt to no man, and is, in a particular manner, tender of his neighbour's reputation, v. 3. He *does no evil* at all *to his neighbour* willingly or designedly, nothing to offend or grieve his spirit, nothing to prejudice the health or ease of his body, nothing to injure him in his estate or secular interests, in his family or relations; but walks by that golden rule of equity, To do as he would be done by. He is especially careful not to injure his neighbour in his good name, though many, who would not otherwise wrong their neighbours, make nothing of that. If any man, in this matter, bridles not his tongue, his religion is vain. He knows the worth of a good name, and therefore *he backbites not*, defames no man, speaks evil of no man, makes not others' faults the subject of his common talk, much less of his sport and ridicule, nor speaks of them with pleasure, nor at all but for edification. He makes the best of every body, and the worst of nobody. He does not *take up a reproach*, that is, he neither raises it nor receives it; he gives no credit nor countenance to a calumny, but frowns upon a backbiting tongue, and so silences it, ⁴¹²³Proverbs 25:23. If an ill-natured character of his neighbour be given him, or an ill-natured story be told him, he will disprove it if he can; if not, it shall die with him and go no further. His *charity will cover a multitude of sins*.

4. He is one that values men by their virtue and piety, and not by the figure they make in the world, v. 5.

(1.) He thinks the better of no man's wickedness for his pomp and grandeur: *In his eyes a vile person is contemned*. Wicked people are vile people, worthless and good for nothing (so the word signifies), as dross, as

chaff, and as salt that has lost its savour. They are vile in their choices (²⁴⁰³Jeremiah 2:13), in their practices, (²³⁰⁶Isaiah 32:6). For this wise and good men condemn them, not denying them civil honour and respect as men, as men in authority and power perhaps (⁴⁰⁰⁷1 Peter 2:17, ⁶³⁰⁷Romans 13:7), but, in their judgment of them, agreeing with the word of God. They are so far from envying them that they pity them, despising their gains (²³⁰⁵Isaiah 33:15), as turning to no account, their dainties (⁴⁴⁰⁴Psalms 141:4), their pleasures (³⁸¹²Hebrews 11:24, 25) as sapless and insipid. They despise their society (³⁸¹⁵Psalms 119:115; ⁴²⁰²2 Kings 3:14); they despise their taunts and threats, and are not moved by them, nor disturbed at them; they despise the feeble efforts of their impotent malice (³⁹⁰¹Psalms 2:1, 4), and will shortly triumph in their fall, (⁴³⁰⁶Psalms 52:6, 7). God despises them, and they are of his mind.

(2.) He thinks the worse of no man's piety for his poverty and meanness, *but he knows those that fear the Lord*. He reckons that serious piety, wherever it is found, puts an honour upon a man, and makes his face to shine, more than wealth, or wit, or a great name among men, does or can. He honours such, esteems them very highly in love, desires their friendship and conversation and an interest in their prayers, is glad of an opportunity to show them respect or do them a good office, pleads their cause and speaks of them with veneration, rejoices when they prosper, grieves when they are removed, and their memory, when they are gone, is precious with him. By this we may judge of ourselves in some measure. What rules do we go by in judging of others?

5. He is one that always prefers a good conscience before any secular interest or advantage whatsoever; for, if he has promised upon oath to do any thing, though afterwards it appear much to his damage and prejudice in his worldly estate, yet he adheres to it and *changes not*, v. 4. See how weak-sighted and short-sighted even wise and good men may be; they may *swear to their own hurt*, which they were not aware of when they took the oath. But see how strong the obligation of an oath is, that a man must rather suffer loss to himself and his family than wrong his neighbour by breaking his oath. An oath is a sacred thing, which we must not think to play fast and loose with.

6. He is one that will not increase his estate by any unjust practices, v. 5.

(1.) Not by extortion: *He putteth not out his money to usury*, that he may live at ease upon the labours of others, while he is in a capacity for

improving it by his own industry. Not that it is any breach of the law of justice or charity for the lender to share in the profit which the borrower makes of his money, any more than for the owner of the land to demand rent from the occupant, money being, by art and labour, as improvable as land. But a citizen of Zion will freely lend to the poor, according to his ability, and not be rigorous and severe in recovering his right from those that are reduced by Providence.

(2.) Not by bribery: He will not *take a reward against the innocent*; if he be any way employed in the administration of public justice, he will not, for any gain, or hope of it, to himself, do any thing to the prejudice of a righteous cause.

III. The psalm concludes with a ratification of this character of the citizen of Zion. He is like Zion-hill itself, which cannot be moved, but abides for ever, ~~431~~ Psalm 125:1. Every true living member of the church, like the church itself, is built upon a rock, which the gates of hell cannot prevail against: *He that doeth these things shall never be moved*; shall not be moved *for ever*, so the word is. The grace of God shall always be sufficient for him, to preserve him safe and blameless to the heavenly kingdom. Temptations shall not overcome him, troubles shall not overwhelm him, nothing shall rob him of his present peace nor his future bliss.

In singing this psalm we must teach and admonish ourselves, and one another, to answer the characters here given of the citizen of Zion, that we may never be moved from God's tabernacle on earth, and may arrive, at last, at that holy hill where we shall be for ever out of the reach of temptation and danger.