

Psalm 15

"Faith without works is dead"

October 29, 2023

1. Intro

- a. In many churches this week, all across the US, Fall Festivals happened in place of the typical, secular Halloween festivities
 - i. Inflatables were blown up in church parking lots
 - ii. Lots of games and activities were played
 - iii. And no doubt LOTS of candy was handed out!!
 1. I'm not against Fall Festivals in general... I'm actually not a fan of Halloween, AT ALL
 - a. With it's emphasis on death and fear and sometimes the blatantly demonic, if churches can somewhat Christianize this holiday, then go right ahead
 - iv. But what makes me sad is that very few churches, and as a result, very few Christians, celebrate the other major event that happens on October 31st each year
 1. That event is Reformation Day
 - a. As we talked about a couple of weeks ago when we learned a little bit about the life of Martin Luther, October 31st, 1517, was the day that Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany
 - i. Luther wasn't trying to start a rebellion, or a new movement
 - ii. He certainly wasn't trying to start a new church
 1. He simply had seen some of the errors of the Roman Catholic church, and he wanted to begin a discussion to see if they could be addressed
 2. Obviously, things didn't quite go as Luther had planned
 - a. Some students of the school got hold of his 95 Theses, and, through the use of the newly invented printing press, these ideas were quickly and widely spread throughout Germany
 - i. And the rest, to use the old cliché, is history
 - v. The Protestant Reformation wasn't just a religious upheaval
 1. You see, in the 1500's, many governments in the countries of Europe ALSO fell under the rule and the influence of the Roman Catholic church
 - a. So, as people began to see the corruption that existed in Rome, it didn't just mean a mass exodus out of the Catholic church
 - i. It meant the establishment of new political ideologies
 - ii. It meant new forms of government
 - iii. In many countries, it meant an overthrow of the current king or queen who ruled the land
 - b. The Protestant Reformation marked a MASSIVE shift in Europe
 - i. And it marked a MASSIVE shift in the Church
 - vi. Which is why, today, in a few churches at least, the Sunday before Halloween is not celebrated as a day to hold a Fall Festival
 1. But rather, it is celebrated as Reformation Sunday
 - a. It is celebrated as the Day that we remember, not the discovery of new truths in the Bible, but the RECOVERY of OLD truths
 - i. The truth that we are not saved by our works, but by the grace of our great God
 - ii. The truth that we can never clean ourselves up enough to be found righteous before a holy God, but we must instead place our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, who alone can save
 1. We are saved by grace, through faith
 2. But the Reformers didn't stop there...

- vii. One of the great statements that came out of the Reformation was, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone” (repeat)
 - 1. This a key doctrinal truth for us as Protestant Christians
 - a. For the accusation from Rome against the Reformation was that, if the church no longer has authority over the people, and no longer determines who is saved – through their performance of certain ceremonies or rituals or practices – then all the Christians will essentially become wild and unruly and full of sin
 - i. The argument went, if you tell someone they are saved simply by their faith, well, that gives them the excuse to live however they want to, doesn’t it?
 - b. So the Reformers had to be very clear
 - 2. They had to affirm that saving faith must ALWAYS be accompanied by GOOD WORKS
 - a. Not as a means of earning our salvation, but as EVIDENCE that we have been saved
 - i. We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone
- viii. As I said a few moments ago, this wasn’t a new truth the Reformers came up with
 - 1. It was a recovery of an old truth
 - a. Specifically, it was a recovery of James 2:17, which says,
 - i. *¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
 - b. Faith without works, is dead
 - c. Faith without works, isn’t really faith at all
 - d. Faith without a conformity to the commands found all throughout the Scriptures, IS NOT a saving faith
 - i. Our good works, our obedience to the Word, is the fruit – the outward evidence – that shows that we have TRULY placed our faith in Jesus Christ
 - ii. This was a key teaching of the Reformation
 - 1. And this is key for our understanding and application of Psalm 15 this morning
 - a. Let’s look at this short Psalm together...
 - b. Psalm 15
 - i. *A Psalm of David. ¹O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ²He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ⁴in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.*
 - c. Again, similar to last week, we do not know the context in which this Psalm was written
 - i. One view of some commentators that COULD fit, is that David wrote this Psalm after the Israelites had brought the Ark to Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 15
 - 1. If you know the history of this episode, you’ll remember that this was actually David’s second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem
 - a. The first time they tried to do this, it did not go well at all
 - i. God had specifically given commands regarding the ark, that it only be carried by using long poles, which were to rest on the shoulders of the Levites
 - ii. For whatever reason, David did not enforce this rule, and they attempted to bring the ark to Jerusalem on a cart pulled by oxen
 - 1. But, when the oxen stumbled, Uzzah put his hand upon the ark to steady it, and 1 Chronicles 13:10 says that the Lord struck him dead on the spot
 - 2. David was not only angry about this, but he was in great fear
 - a. And he wouldn’t go near the ark for the next three months
 - i. After those three months, David reassembled all of Israel, and they went back and got the ark, and this time, they brought it to Jerusalem in the way that God had prescribed

3. This event would certainly explain the weight and the reverence surrounding David's opening question, wouldn't it?
 - a. O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
 - b. David, and the people of Israel, had witnessed firsthand the holiness of God
 - i. Uzzah didn't do anything REALLY bad, did he?
 1. He just wanted to make sure the ark didn't fall off the cart
 - ii. And yet, God struck him dead
 1. For God is HOLY
 - a. And we are NOT to deal with Him in whatever way WE want
- d. So, who can sojourn in the tent of such a holy God? Who can dwell in HIS presence?
 - i. Well, thankfully, David goes on in this Psalm to give us 11 characteristics of the man or woman who CAN dwell in God's presence
 1. We all like lists, don't we?
 - a. We all like to have objectives clearly laid out before us, so we can know exactly what we're supposed to do, and we can check off the boxes when these things are finished
 - i. My dad likes to give all of his subcontractors a punchlist near the end of the job, to make sure we get everything done that needs to be done
 - ii. There's a certain degree of satisfaction in crossing things off these lists, isn't there?
 - b. So David helpfully gives us 11 things that we can do so that we can dwell with a holy God
 - e. But there's a problem with David's list, isn't there?
 - i. David asks, "Who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?"
 1. And the first thing he says is, "He who walks blamelessly..."
 - a. I just want to get a quick show of hands... anyone nail this command this past week?
 - i. As you examine your thoughts and your words and your actions over the past few days, compared to the holy Word of God, were any of you BLAMELESS before the Lord? No one??
 - ii. We might be able to look at some of the other things on David's list and say, "Yeah, I did OK on this or that..."
 1. But NONE of us can say that we were BLAMELESS before God
 - iii. We're ALL just like poor Uzzah... maybe we want to do the right thing in our hearts, but we all ultimately make a mess out of everything
 - ii. And therefore, when David asks, "Who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?", we're left with the sobering reality...
 1. Well, NONE OF US can dwell with God
 - a. As we saw last week in Romans 3, "None is righteous, no, NOT ONE"
 - f. Not one, that is, except for CHRIST!
 - i. Jesus is the only one who can look at this first requirement of walking BLAMELESSLY before God and say, "Yep. Got it. Check that box. Cross that off the list."
 1. He is the spotless Lamb... the sinless One
 2. He is the only begotten Son who walked in perfect obedience to the Father
 - a. He is the One who does ONLY what is right
 - b. He is the One who ONLY speaks truth in his heart
 - c. He is the ONLY blameless One
 3. This is why Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:15-16 that Christ is with God, "*who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. TO HIM be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*"
 - ii. Jesus is the ONLY One worthy of such honor, to dwell in the holy presence of God
 1. Which is why our ONLY hope of salvation is to put our faith – not in ourselves – but in Christ ALONE

- iii. This is the clear declaration of the Gospel of the Good News of Jesus Christ
 - 1. When you, a sinful and wretched human being, stand before a holy and righteous God, you have ZERO chance of dwelling in His presence
 - 2. The deepest recesses of your heart will be fully exposed for who you are
 - 3. And you will rightly stand condemned before Him, as He executes His judgment and wrath against you, and you are declared GUILTY
- iv. UNLESS, you have ALREADY died to yourself, and placed ALL of your faith in His Son
 - 1. This is your ONLY hope, my friends
 - a. If your hope of salvation is that you will be able to stand before God and say, “Well I did this... or I did that,” then you are building your house on a foundation of sand
 - i. And it will not weather the storm of God’s awful and terrifying justice
 - v. This is the truth that Martin Luther, and many others, recovered
 - 1. It is ONLY by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, that ANYONE can ever be saved!!
- 2. So, does this mean that we look at passages of Scripture like Psalm 15 and say, “Well, I can’t live up to that, so I guess there’s nothing here that applies to me...”?
 - a. NO! Remember, we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is NEVER alone
 - i. Faith without works... is DEAD
- 3. So, once we are looking at the Scriptures through the correct lenses – through Jesus – we can then apply the Scriptures, RIGHTLY
 - a. As we are walking with Christ, we are called to walk as David wrote in verse 2 – we are called to walk blamelessly, and to do what is right, and to speak truth in our hearts
 - i. In Philippians 1:9-11, Paul writes...
 - 1. ⁹... it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and BLAMELESS for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.
 - ii. In Philippians 2:14-16, Paul says...
 - 1. ¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be BLAMELESS and innocent, children of God WITHOUT BLEMISH in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast to the word of life...
 - iii. And in 2 Peter 3:14, Peter says,
 - 1. ¹⁴Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these [the new heavens and the new earth], be diligent to be found by God spotless and BLAMELESS, and at peace.
 - iv. Brothers and sisters, IN CHRIST, we are called to be walk BLAMELESSLY before God
- b. We are also called to love our neighbor well
 - i. We see this in verse 3 of Psalm 15, when David says that he who will dwell with God, “does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”
 - ii. This was something that Jesus was very clear on, wasn’t it?
 - 1. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said,
 - a. ²¹You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.
 - i. Jesus was VERY firm on not slandering our neighbor with our tongue, or taking up reproaches against our friends
 - 2. And, just to make sure we know who our neighbor is, Jesus gave us the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37
 - a. When the unnamed stranger in Jesus’ story is attacked on the streets, it is not the priest or the Levite who stop to give him help, is it?
 - b. No, instead it is the Samaritan – the man despised by the Jews as a traitor and a half-breed – who showed mercy to the man in need
 - i. It was the Samaritan who showed what it meant to love your neighbor
 - ii. Jesus’ intent was clear:

1. Our neighbor is ANYONE who is in need, whether they are our friend or our enemy
3. Who will dwell with God on His holy hill?
 - a. Those who love their neighbor as themselves – completely IRREGARDLESS of whether or not his neighbor deserves that love, or if they return that love
 - b. Try doing THAT in your own strength and determination!
 - i. It doesn't work, does it?
4. It is only THROUGH Christ that we can love our neighbor as we are commanded
 - a. For it is only through Christ that we understand the depth of God's love FOR US, even when we were HIS enemies
5. Those who will dwell with God will not slander with their tongue, or do evil to their neighbor, or take up a reproach against their friend
- c. And those who will dwell with God will ALSO despise what is vile, and honor the fear of the Lord, even though it might cost them EVERYTHING
 - i. In verse 4 of Psalm 15, David writes that those who will sojourn in God's tent are those *"in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; those who swear to their own hurt, and do not change"*
 1. Obviously, as we just talked about, as followers of Christ we are NOT called to despise our neighbor, but to love them
 - a. But we are most certainly called to despise their ACTIONS, if they are living and acting in a way that goes against the Scriptures
 - i. Again, think back to Paul's words in Philippians 2 when he calls them a "crooked and twisted generation"
 - ii. Or Acts 2:40 when Luke writes of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, saying,
 1. ⁴⁰And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."
 - iii. Or Paul reminding the believers in Ephesians 2:3 that they used to be "children of wrath, like the rest of mankind"
 - b. As new creations in Christ, called to follow Christ, we are to despise what is vile
 - i. For it is the vileness that resides in ALL of our flesh that has made this world crooked and twisted
 - ii. It is the vileness in our flesh that once made us children of wrath
 1. If we are to dwell with God, we must despise what is vile
 - c. But we must ALSO replace that vileness with the fear of God
 2. It isn't enough for us as Christians to just go around pointing out how vile everyone's actions are, or how depraved this world is, or how sin is running rampant throughout our society
 - ii. We must ALSO honor those who fear the Lord
 1. Jesus reminds us of the crucial importance of the fear of the Lord in Luke 12:4-5, when he says,
 - a. *⁴"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"*
 2. In our Wednesday night study on 1 Peter, we talked this past week about the circumstances under which Peter wrote this letter
 - a. The Christians had already endured three decades of persecution from the Jewish religious leaders
 - i. But now that persecution was beginning to come from Rome as well
 - ii. It would only be a few short years after Peter wrote this letter that he himself would be imprisoned by the Roman Empire, and eventually crucified for his faith

- b. But when you read Peter’s letter, you don’t find any fear of man, or fear of persecution, or even fear of death
 - i. Instead, we find the Apostle gently, but firmly, encouraging the Christians to live holy lives
 - ii. We find him telling the Christians in chapter 1, verse 17, to “conduct themselves WITH FEAR throughout the time of their exile”
 - 1. For, according to chapter 4, verse 17, judgment begins WITH THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD
- iii. Why have Christians for so long been RIGHTLY characterized as harsh and unloving and judgmental?
 - 1. Because we have despised what is vile, but we HAVE NOT honored the fear of the Lord
 - a. When we walk in the fear of the Lord, we will be humble
 - b. When we walk in the fear of the Lord, we will be full of grace
 - c. When we walk in the fear of the Lord, we will be obedient
- iv. But we need to understand something here...
 - 1. When we despise what is vile, and when we honor the fear of the Lord, it will cost us
 - a. David says in verse 4 that he who will dwell on God’s holy hill will “swear to his own hurt,” and he will not change
 - i. This is the picture of one who stands firmly upon their convictions, isn’t it?
 - ii. When you choose to despise what is vile and to call people to walk in the fear of God, you will not be a popular person in the world
 - b. So the question is, what will be your response when the world turns against you? What will be my response?
 - i. Sadly, there are MANY in the church who have given in to compromise
 - 1. They did not “swear to their own hurt,” but instead, when the hurt came, they changed
 - a. They gave in to the pressure
 - b. They let go of their convictions
 - c. And they walked away from the fear of the Lord
- v. This is the great danger for all who do not count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus
 - 1. Listen to Jesus’ own words in Luke 14:25-33, as he spoke to the great crowds who were following him...
 - a. *²⁶If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*
 - 2. Jesus isn’t just talking about renouncing money and possessions – he’s talking about renouncing EVERYTHING
 - a. Most especially, he’s talking about renouncing our COMFORT
 - i. In this world, you WILL be hated if you live for Christ
 - ii. You WILL be slandered if you despise what is vile
 - iii. You WILL be persecuted if you honor those who fear the Lord
 - b. And Jesus says very plainly, if you cannot handle that, then you cannot be his disciple
 - i. We must COUNT THE COST, my friends
 - 1. Will we “swear to our hurt,” and refuse to change our conviction when the whole weight of the world comes against us

2. In Christ, your answer to that question can be a firm, "YES!"
- d. So who will dwell with God on His holy hill
 - i. Those who are blameless
 - ii. Those who love their neighbor
 - iii. Those who despise what is vile and who fear the Lord
- e. And fourth, those who are not greedy with their money
 - i. In verse 5, David writes that those who will sojourn in God's tent are those who do not put out their money at interest, and who do not take a bribe against the innocent
 1. In the economy of God, there is no room at all for the greedy
 - a. In 1 Corinthians 5:11-13, Paul is unwavering on this truth when he says,
 - i. *¹¹But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹²For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."*
 - b. We are quick to purge the sexually immoral and the drunkards from our midst
 - c. But will we purge the greedy from our churches?
 - i. Paul would say, for the purity of the bride of Christ, we absolutely should
 2. For no one can serve two masters, can they?
 - a. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other
 - i. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, "You CANNOT serve God and money"
- f. Who will sojourn in God's tent? Who shall dwell on His holy hill?
 - i. Those who are blameless
 - ii. Those who love their neighbor
 - iii. Those who despise what is vile and fear the Lord
 - iv. And those who are not slaves to their bank accounts
4. And David concludes with this incredible truth:
 - a. He who does these things shall NEVER be moved
 - i. This makes total sense if we are doing these things IN CHRIST
 1. If we are truly IN CHRIST today, we will ALWAYS be in Christ!
 2. For he will not lose even one of those whom the Father has given to him!!
 - ii. This is the assurance that we so desperately need, isn't it?
 1. For on most days, we aren't so blameless, are we?
 2. On most days, we don't love our neighbors so well, do we?
 3. On most days, we tend to embrace the vile, as long as its not as vile as the guy down the street
 4. On most days, especially here in the American church, we make every attempt to try to serve both God and money, don't we?
 - iii. Friends, we are hopeless apart from Jesus, aren't we??
 1. Thank God we are not saved by our own good works
 2. Thank God we are not KEPT by our own good works
 - a. It is ALL Christ, from start to finish
 - i. We are saved, only by placing our faith in him
 - ii. And the evidence, the fruit that shows that we have truly been saved, is that we will DO good works
 1. This is WHY you were saved, my friends
 - iv. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10,

1. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
 - a. God saved you, that you might walk blamelessly before Him
 - b. God saved you, that you might love your neighbor well
 - c. God saved you, that you might despise what is vile and fear Him as He deserves
 - d. And God saved you, that you might be exceedingly generous with your money, since you are no longer a slave to your greed
 - i. You are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works
 - ii. Now, in the power of Christ, it is time to get to work!