**Guest in God’s house**  8/1/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 15, 2Peter 1

Text: Psalm 15

Psalms: 27:1-5, 15,24, 117

Some years ago a man came to stay at our place here in Sydney. Our children asked who he was and where he was from. He was from India but I had never met him before. ‘How come this man you don’t even know is staying in our house?’ I explained that a good friend of mine had asked if this man could come and stay with us. He was a fellow believer, and on the word of this friend I welcomed him into our house. In a similar way, God welcomes us into his house on the word of His Son, Jesus Christ- actually on his word and his work, on the basis of his death on the cross as payment for our sins.

As we read this psalm about entering into the presence of the Lord, it is good to remember that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our good works (Eph 2:8,9). I was told that this psalm became popular when liberalism entered the Presbyterian Church, leading to the split back in the 1970’s. People were misunderstanding the psalm in terms of works righteousness and justification when the psalm is about sanctification, about being righteous not becoming righteous. The conclusion is not, ‘shall be saved’ but, ‘shall not be moved’. Moreover, this psalm is not about rituals and sacrifices but about what God sees in our hearts. And what he sees in our hearts if we are allowed into his presence is what God in his grace and by his Spirit has put there.

This wisdom psalm has three steps: a question, a response, and a concluding promise. It has parallels in Psalm 24 and in Isaiah 33:14-16.

**1. The question**

When the Lord brought his people out of Egypt he told Moses to build a tent of worship. Inside this tent was the Ark of the Covenant which represented the presence of the Lord. David set this tent up in Jerusalem when built his palace there. Some think this psalm may come from the occasion of David bringing the ark up to Jerusalem. Everyone in Israel came to this tent, later the temple, to worship the Lord. They came with sacrifices and offerings; they came with joy and thanksgiving (Ps 122). They knew that without blood they could not enter the presence of almighty God. David does not mention sacrifices or rituals in this psalm but focusses on the heart of the worshipper. David knew that God looks on the heart because at his anointing the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart’ (1Sam 16:7). In Psalm 24 we are told that we must have ‘clean hands and a pure heart’ in order to ‘stand in His holy place’ (Ps 24:3, 4).

David refers to the Lord’s tabernacle or sanctuary, and to ‘Your holy hill’ (15:1). He would have been aware that Moses built the tabernacle or tent of meeting according to the pattern God gave him. He knew about the heavenly tabernacle or sanctuary even as he wrote this psalm. When David’s son of adultery died, he said, ‘I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me’ (2Sam 12:23). Even Abraham desired ‘a better, that is a heavenly country’ (Heb 11:16). So let us read or sing this psalm with this heavenly perspective in mind. We are not going to return to temple worship in Jerusalem, or continue in our earthly church building; these are but temporary places of meeting with the Lord. Jesus is now on the throne in heaven. When he comes again it will be to take us to this place prepared for us. But there is a continuity; the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This psalm speaks to us today because when we come to worship God we are coming into his holy presence.

This psalm, as we have said, speaks about abiding or dwelling in the Lord’s presence. Jesus used the word ‘abide’, saying, ‘If you abide in me and my words abide in you’, you ‘will bear much fruit, and God the Father will be glorified’ (John 15:7, 8). The priests were privileged to dwell in the Lord’s house and serve him, but David desired to dwell there are a guest, a guest of God. ‘I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever’ (Ps 23:6). The church, the assembly of believers here on earth, is supposed to be the closest thing to heaven- does this surprise you? When God’s people are gathered to worship him, his presence is with them (Mat 18:20). Not everyone who gathers in church here on earth will be guests of the Lord in heaven of course! There are still lots of people relying on rituals and good works rather than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are still lots of people worshipping with their lips while ‘their hearts are far from me’ (Isa 29:13).

**2. The response**

An answer to the question, ‘Who may dwell in the Lord’s presence?’ is found in verses 2-5. It is somewhat different to the Ten Commandments in that it has more positive than negative requirements. It is like our Lord’s summary of the Ten Commandments into the two love commandments; ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind, and, love your neighbour as yourself’ (Mat 22:32-29). David does not use the word ‘love’ but he does speak of truth and righteousness, and also of how we treat our neighbour (15:3).

The first things required of anyone who wants to dwell in God’s house, as stated in verse 2, are conditions on our conduct before God. This is about sanctification, about being holy as God is holy (1Peter 1:16). David speaks about walking, about works, and about words or speaking the truth. Firstly, we must walk uprightly or blamelessly. This is about seeking to walk according to God’s will, his good pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:2). Psalm 1, another wisdom psalm, tells us not to walk in the ways of the wicked. Here our walk is to be upright, sound, or whole-hearted. We must be people of integrity, not swerving from the right path, as demonstrated to us by Jesus our Lord. Micah speaks of walking ‘humbly before your God’, as well as ‘doing justly and loving mercy’ (Mic 6:8). Jesus speaks of the narrow way that leads to life.

We must be right before God and do what is right before God. We must live a moral life, upholding morals given by God, not man. Many make up their own morals, and even our law makers make laws according to man’s morals- but this will not do. To dwell in the Lord’s house we must be walking and working according to God’s laws and Biblical morality, seeking to please God not ourselves or other people.

Truth is fundamental to dwelling in God’s presence because Jesus, God’s Son, is truth. Truth is not what I say it is but what God says it is. Truth belongs to the very nature of God; God cannot lie. Truth must be firmly planted in our hearts if we are to dwell in God’s presence. Note the word ‘heart’ in verse 2. God sees our hearts and sees whether or not we are as person of truth; God hates hypocrites and liars. We must not only speak the truth but speak truth from the heart, and Paul would add, ‘speak the truth in love’ (Eph 4:15). As believers we have been given new hearts- the old has gone and the new has come (2Cor 5:17). Yet our old sinful nature is not completely dead; we find ourselves saying with David, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God’ (Ps 51:10).

We come to the word ‘neighbour’ and to what is required in our relationships with other people. The Lord is concerned about these relationships. Controlling out tongue is the biggest concern. People who slander or ‘backbite’ are not welcome in God’s presence (15:3). It is so easy to backbite, or spread a rumour about a neighbour, usually by way of revenge. Some go beyond words in doing evil to a neighbour. Remember your spouse is your neighbour. Do you backbite or bring up old hurts when an argument begins. Remember that for God to forgive your sin you must forgive others their sin- it is in the Lord’s Prayer! No slander, no doing evil, and the final negative, no taking part in the reproach of a friend or neighbour. Do not gloat over the misfortune of another, or rake up the past to their hurt. This may be standard practice in politics but not in the house of God. ‘The wise will neither initiate nor rejoice in the reproach of their associates- they will empathize in their hurts’.

Loving your neighbour does not mean approving everything they do and say. There are vile people, people who blaspheme the name of the Lord and mock God. But God will not be mocked. We should make it clear that we belong to God, and that God’s enemies are our enemies. This is not judging; it is choosing sides. We are to despise the vile person and honour those who fear the Lord (15:4). Loyalty to the Lord and to his people will mark the man who dwells in the house of the Lord. Integrity and loyalty are not demanded by the world but they are demanded by God. The world uses these words but in meaningless ways. For example, businesses get you to sign up to a ‘loyalty program’ with promises of points or gifts when, in truth, no loyalty is involved- just profit making. Years ago I had lots of loyalty points when the business went bust - so no more ‘loyalty’ cards for me!

David refers to swearing oaths or vows at the end of verse 4- basically of keeping your word or promise. Just like loyalty was meaningless to the business I spoke of, so promises are meaningless to many- they make promises but make no effort to keep their word. If they don’t forget what they promised, they make some excuse for not keeping it. But vows and promises are taken seriously by the Lord, who knows every word we utter. Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’, and your ‘no’, ‘no’, lest you fall into judgment’ (James 5:12, Mat 5:37). If you want to dwell in God’s house be careful about making promises, and when you do, be sure to keep your word, even it costs you by way of money, time, or other hurt. Even promises made in your heart should be kept because they are known to the Lord; ‘So let each one give as he purposed in his heart to give’ (2Cor 9:7).

The courts recently concluded that Melissa Caddick was dead, even though only her severed foot has been found. This woman had defrauded mainly family and friends of $30m dollars in order to live a lavish lifestyle here in Sydney. Imagine defrauding even your family! When God’s people turned away from him they started exploiting their poor neighbours in two ways. Firstly, they started lending money at exorbitant rates of interest. Jesus found money leaders in the temple exploiting those who came to worship God. God’s people were allowed to charge interest to foreigners but not to the poor in their land (Deut 23:19, 20). Imagine daily news bulletins that made no reference to banks and interest rates!

Secondly, bribery is forbidden because it perverts justice; innocent people are convicted (Deut 16:19). In too many societies, judges are bribed by rich people so that poor and innocent people are condemned. In India not only judges but college principals and even postmen take bribes- just to give you your letter he may ask for some money! God’s holiness includes justice and mercy, so anyone perverting justice or exploiting the poor and needy, has no place in the house of the Lord.

**3. The promise**

Derek Kidner refers to the person who can be God’s guest as being: in character, true; in words, restrained; in allegiances, clear-cut, in his dealings, honourable. To such a person a place in God’s house is assured: ‘He who does these things shall never be moved’ (15:5); the word is ‘moved’ or ‘shaken’ not ‘saved’ (cf. Ps 16:8). The apostle Peter writes of making ‘your call and election sure’ by doing these things, and ‘you will never stumble’ (2Peter 1:10); ‘these things’ include goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

Not only will you never stumble but you will ‘receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2Peter 1:11 NIV). Do you want to dwell in the house of the Lord forever? First, you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, believe that he forgives your sins. Second, you must live in obedience to Christ’s commands. You must live with integrity and loyalty; you must have ‘clean hands and a pure heart’ (Ps 24:4). If you are such a person, be assured that when God shakes this world in judgment you will stand firm in Him (Rev 3:10).