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Psalm 15

Meditation 1— Introductory

Question

¹YHWH, who can comfortably reside in Your dwelling place?
Who may permanently remain in Your temple preeminent?

Answer

²One whose behavior is sound,
who does what is right,
and genuinely speaks what is true.
³No slander escapes his tongue.
He brings no harm to a fellow citizen.
He does not countenance the dishonoring of those around him.
⁴He rejects the contemptuous,
but he honors those who reverence YHWH
He makes commitments that may harm him,
but will not renege on them.
⁵He does not lend money at interest.
He does not accept a bribe that might turn a case against the innocent.
He that acts in these ways
can never be shaken.

Except for the joyous apotheosis found in Psalm 8, it has been a brutal slog through Psalms 3-14. The malevolently immoral have been everywhere. At times, they almost seem to dominate the stage. This is not simply my own sense of the text. The Psalmist, himself, seems to share my sentiments.

“the malevolently immoral roaming about absolutely everywhere
whenever what is despicable is celebrated among humankind.”¹

Indeed, God seems to share the Psalmists and my own sentiments.

“YHWH looked down from the heavens upon humankind
to determine, if there were any possessing knowledge;
any consulting ’ēlohîm.
The whole lot of them had rebelled;
as one, they had become morally tainted,
not a one of them acting beneficially.
None! Not even one!”²

¹ Psalm 12.⁸

² Psalm 14.²⁻³

If not for the Psalmist's testimony of God and his expressions of confidence in Him, the text and the state of the world that it depicts could overwhelm and discourage. Even with the Psalmist's testimony, the ugly truths found in this group of psalms and the continuing threat of the malevolently immoral can be intimidating and perplexing.

“How long, YHWH? Will You always ignore me?
How long will You conceal Yourself from me?
How long must I suffer deep doubt,
deeply grieving day in and day out?
How long will my enemy continue to have the advantage over me?”³

Over the course of Psalms 3-14, we have learned much of the attitudes, behaviors, and character of the malevolently immoral, to whom we were immediately introduced in Psalm 1.¹ They use falsehood and deception to smear the reputation of good and innocent individuals (4.², 12.¹⁻²). Their falsehoods and deceptions are violent, cruel, and intended to harm others (5.⁴⁻⁷, 7.¹⁴). The malevolently immoral take special aim at the vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the downtrodden, and the innocent (10.³⁻¹¹). They live by their lusts and seek only to fulfill those lusts (10.³). If they give thought to God, they twist his principles (10.⁵), deny Him place in human affairs (10.¹³, 14.¹), and deny accountability for the wrongs they commit against Him and His standards (10.⁶, 12.⁴).

This represents but a sampling of the Psalmist's characterization of the malevolently immoral in these first 14 Psalms. The Psalmist understands that the malevolently immoral must not be given a voice or place among the just or where decisions are made and governance is conducted (1.⁵). He knows that God is

“... not a God who takes pleasure in willful wrongdoing;
that cruelty cannot find security in You;
that those who intend harm cannot stand in Your presence;
that You reject all who act abusively.
that You bring an end to those who utter falsehood;
that YHWH abhors the violent and deceptive individual.”⁴

As for the Psalmist, on the other hand,

“because of the immensity of Your unwavering devotion to me,
I can enter Your house.
I can bow down in Your temple preeminent;
bow in reverence to You.”⁵

The Psalmist feels such assurance first and foremost because of God's character and His unwavering devotion to him. But the Psalmist also knows that

“YHWH is in His temple preeminent.
YHWH is in heaven on His throne.

³ Psalm 13.¹⁻²

⁴ Psalm 5.⁴⁻⁶

⁵ Psalm 5.⁷

His eyes observe.
His glances evaluate mortal beings.
YHWH approves of the just..."⁶

This brings us to Psalm 15. Here, the Psalmist explores directly the sort of attitudes, behaviors, and character that allow entrance into God's temple and His presence. Through his exploration, we will learn more about what it means to be malevolently immoral. At the same time, we will learn what it means to be the opposite of malevolently immoral—to be benevolently moral. We will learn what attitudes, behaviors, and character constitute benevolent morality.

This pattern found in Psalms 3-15 of describing the negative to be avoided then moving to the positive that should be adopted follows the pattern found in the very first verses of the Book of Psalms. Psalm 1.¹ announces the negative,

"How truly fulfilled is one who
does not walk by the direction of the malevolently immoral,
does not stand in the path of wrongdoers,
and does not sit in gatherings with the contemptuously antisocial!"

Psalm 1.² follows this up with the positive,

"Rather, they choose YHWH's instruction,
and consult his teachings at all times."

With Psalm 15, then, we hear God teach the attitudes, actions, and character that we must develop as well as the attitudes, actions, and character that we are to avoid in order to safely abide His presence.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁶ Psalm 11.⁴⁻⁵