

Psalm 15:1
Worshippers: Wayfaring Strangers
What does the text say?

Read Psalm 15... **Verse 1: Lord, who may sojourn in Your tent, who may dwell on Your holy mountain?**

In my imagination I picture the worship leader standing before the congregation and the Lord, directing the people to worship. Who may worship? Who may enter the presence? He knows their heart and his. But still he sees them as worshippers at the entrance to the temple. Why would he even ask such a question? Would that not make them doubt their desire for worship? These are faithful Israelites who are making a yearly pilgrimage during one of the feasts to the holy mountain, to Jerusalem, where the temple sits. His question is to God in the hearing of the people: Lord, who may worship? What would you think if I asked God: God may Georges worship, may Kevin, may Carol? Who may come into your presence? David answers his own question of the life of the worshipper in verses 2-5. But before I get into his answers next week, today, I want to spend time considering this strange question of who may worship!

Why would he ask who may worship? Why does such a question come into his mind? Couldn't anyone who wants to just enter into his presence and worship at will? David knows God is holy and perfect and he knows he and the people aren't. He must ask the question and we must ask the question. But here's the other side. We can't help but worship. We desire to be in the presence of God. On the one hand, we are not worthy to enter the presence of God. On the other hand, God is totally worthy of worship and we can't help ourselves. We have to worship. Man in his nature as man is a worshipper. Do you see the problem? How does a Holy God and the sinful person get to enjoy the presence of each other? Who will God let into his court? Into his house? Into his temple? God desires as pure a worshipper as he can get. One with a heart of worship.

This tension in Psalm 15 is also in the whole Bible. God calls us to be imitators of him. But we are now in Oz and no longer in KS. The fig leaf separates us. We take for granted that we can worship no matter what. That God is going to look the other way no matter how we come to worship.

Despite our sinfulness God desires our worship. It is good for us to worship because worship provides us with the opportunity to come clean before God. To bathe in his holiness and purity. To burn off our sinful edge. He made us in the image of his Son and desires for share his life with us. He longs for us to participate in his divine nature. We can only do that when we come with a heart full of worship. That is basically who we are in God's eyes. Worshipful beings. Worship is an invitation into the presence of the God of the universe. God desires worshippers, he makes us worshippers, he wants us to worship him in spirit and in truth.

The tent was the original Temple of ancient Israel before Solomon built the first temple of wood and stones. So the word tent became slang for the Jerusalem temple. The tent was the mobile temple of the wilderness. For 40 years, ancient Israel wandered in the wilderness with the tent in tow. A constant reminder that they are worshippers of God. They carried the symbol of the presence of God always and when they camped they erected the tent to remind them they are first and foremost worshippers of God.

Experiences of worship often happen on mountains. For Moses, for Abraham, for Elisha and Elijah. All had worshipful experiences on holy mountains. The mountains were holy because of the experience.

Who may dwell? The word dwell is right as long as you understand it in a temporary sense? **Sojourn, though** a bit dated today captures better the meaning. To sojourn means to stay temporarily. It means to stay a little while, to stay as a stranger would stay. The word itself means to stay as a stranger. One who comes from the outside and takes up temporary residence. What? Temporary residence, stranger, in the place of worship? What is that about? Yes we are strangers in the presence of God.

Well, we have to think a little bigger here about human existence in relation to God because by using the word sojourn and dwell, David intends a deeper and fuller understanding of humanity in relation to life and God. He could have used other words to mean permanent stay. But he didn't.

The Bible teaches us that we are only strangers here. God says to ancient Israel, you are: "Strangers resident with me" in Leviticus 25:23. David thought so too. He says in Psalm 39:13 "O hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my cry; do not disregard my tears; for like all my forbears I am an alien, resident with you."

In Deuteronomy 26:4-6 we read: Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us... And these references to being strangers multiply in the Bible.

We are strangers in this place. Nothing in this world is what it will be in final way. Not even our worship. But we are who we are: Worshipers. Something in us longs for permanence in worship; it makes us want more. Our home is with God in worship. That's who we are.

There's another truth here: We are at the mercy of God to be accepted into his presence. We come with humble hearts. If the temple is a symbol of the House of God then we who seek to enter, by analogy, are outsiders, strangers, would be guests who may enter only by permission of the Master of the house. And we must live by the way of life of his house. We can't make the rules of the house. Where God dwells is not our house. We are only guests. We can't force ourselves in. We wait for the invitation. We knock. We seek. We find. We enter at the invitation. We dwell at the mercy of the owner of the house.

And another truth is here: The worshipper who sojourns in the House of God to worship, is coming **as one who is estranged from God.** Life has gotten the best of him at times. So he comes, alienated from God, and he looks to God to restore him and to give him the right hand of fellowship yet again. He's coming back to the heart of worship again and again. He is looking for intimacy and the God of his soul cuddles up to him once more. All we like sheep have gone astray. We are the prodigals who return to worship week in and week out. We lose our ways. We are estranged from God. But we are called back to worship. We come to the Good shepherd and he restores fellowship with us.

And one last truth here: The verb of staying as a stranger makes me think of the issue of the legal status of the stranger in society. The people of God were strangers in the land. They are strangers at worship. They are sojourners. And being a stranger or sojourner means you have no protection against violence and being exploited by others. Abraham knew this very well. In Genesis 15:13, God tells Abraham that his descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years.

God wants his people to welcome the stranger. Don't mistreat them, he says. It's a common theme of the Bible. Love and support the stranger because you were strangers and I loved and supported you. "When you love and support the stranger, you are being like me," God says. Uphold the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriend the stranger, providing him with food and clothing.

The Bedouins are among the desert dwellers of the Middle East. They roam the desert and they see the stranger as an enemy, until he enters the tent. Ah then he becomes protected as a matter of honour by the host who must protect him for at least 3 days. It's temporary as in Genesis 19 (the story of Lot) and Judges 19.

The worshipper who comes into the Temple is a stranger who becomes a guest of God and enjoys divine protection. He enjoys divine intimacy. He enjoys personal communion with God.

There is a second verb in verse 1: **To dwell**. This verb too means to take up temporary abode, or to tent. The noun that comes from the verb in fact is used for a tent. To dwell is to tent. The word Shekhinah comes from the same root. It is the mobile temple or presence of God in the world.

So based on this first verse, we can see how the Psalmist, inspired by God, defines those who belong to him: Worshipers who sojourn with God, temporary dwellers in God's presence. They are temple dwellers. That's who God thinks we are. Dwellers with God in his temple. Sojourners! Wayfaring strangers. How do you like that as your core identity? Could you think of anything better that defines who you are in God's eyes?

What does the culture say?

While God defines us by who we worship the world has a different way of defining who we are. This is my life line, my little chronology, or my clock time: 1949-2017. Pretend, for a moment, that you are asking the average person, even average Christian in the US "who are you?" What is the core of your identity? What kinds of answers are you likely to get? I'm not sure you would readily hear: I am a worshipper of God almighty. Instead you probably will hear one or all three of the following answers.

I am what I do. When we do things and are successful at what we do, we feel good about ourselves. We identify with our success: I am a professor, I am a doctor, teacher, fireman. I am a 4.0 student. I am what I do. The world rewards me for what I do. Good work? Here's a bonus. Good achievements? Here's a good position. Every answer is in relation to what I do versus who I am and who God made me to be. What happens when I fail? How's what I do defines me? I am a loser and the world is not so kind to losers. I feel depressed. When I'm old I might look back on my achievements. I may see your plaques, ribbons, trophies, degrees, achievements certificates. I did well. But what if what I did was simply not recognised by the world as good or good enough. And sooner or later it all goes back in the box. Did what I do really matter at all? It is the wise person who does not base his or her identity on his achievements or doings. It is good and right to achieve and do. But what I'm doubting is the worth given to my doings or yours to define who you are to God. The Psalmist has a different view of of who? We are wayfaring worshippers who enter into the life of God.

I am what others say. Many of us live by what others' say we are. When they say good things, we feel good and free. But when the talk is negative it's a different story. Sadness comes.

Writers and movie makers and artists face this all the time. They live by what the critics say about them. But not only them. We do too. We begin to live to please others. Why we even trust a mood ring to tell us the way we feel about ourselves. 10 of you may come after the sermon and congratulate me on the message. It would feel good and right. But one of you who wasn't that appreciative might say it was OK. Or it wasn't your best. Guess what? Which comment do you think is going to stay with me all afternoon if I let it? Which one will keep raising its head? If I live by what others say, I'll be bouncing like a yoyo.

The world also wants me to live by another identity: You are what you have. You have great health. Great hair. Great looks. You're something. Your 401 k is gaining in double digits. Your children are the stars of the school? You have a great house, two cars in the garage and a dog in the yard. Wonderful. But when I lose my savings, my health, darkness invades. One day it all goes back in the box.

The message of the world is ever with us. William Wordsworth says in his sonnet: "The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"

Much of the world's messaging is just this. Do more. Have more. Get more. Spend more. Sell more. Your neighbour has more, get as much as he has. You are what you do, others say, what you have.

Christians know this world is not our home. We are just passing through. The world says life is short: Live it up, pass the chips, have another scotch and call me in the morning so you can do the same thing today. But we can't go on what the world says we are! Can we? We are not human doings but beings. What others say is important but it doesn't define us. God only does. What we have is ok but it's not us. "A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell." C. S. Lewis. Too many of us now tend to worship self indulgence and consumption. Jimmy Carter. "The core of the person is what he or she loves, and that is bound up with what they worship - that insight recalibrates the radar for cultural analysis. The rituals and practices that form our loves spill out well beyond the sanctuary. Many secular liturgies are trying to get us to love some other kingdom and some other gods." Dallas Willard.

What is the Solution?

From Psalm 15, we must learn to see ourselves as God sees us. Who we are must be defined by him, not us. And he created us to be worshippers. That's the right category. Who am I? A worshipper of God is one of the best definitions I can have of me and you can have of you. When we let God define us we get it right. We avoid a ton of pain. **And God defines his people as Homo Adorans, or Worshipping Man, who belongs in my house? The person who worships God in Spirit and in truth.**

What David didn't know is that in Christ God came to be with us. He became the wayfaring stranger and took our place. He stayed a while. He lived. He died. He rose again. He ascended. He will return. He gave us the Holy Spirit who is now the very presence of God with us. We no longer need temples. Emmanuel is our temple. We dwell permanently in God in Christ. In Colossians 3:3 Paul says we died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. No more timidity. We are no longer strangers.

When Jesus met the woman at the well, in John 4, she was a stranger to God. She was seeking things that could not satisfy her desire to worship the true God. But then she heard Jesus speaking, “draw from my well that never shall run dry. She did and he filled her life and made her whole.”

She defined herself by what she did. Jesus didn't. We even call her a woman of ill repute—letting others define her. She comes to the well at noontime to draw water. Shunned by all, she lives at the mercy of her reputation. She believed all of it. If you knew who I am you wouldn't be asking me for water. Do you know what I've done. I married 5 and I'm on my 6th. I didn't bother with the marriage thing. People are wagging their tongues saying nasty things about me.

This led to a conversation with Jesus about worship. “You Jews worship in Jerusalem. But we Samaritans worship on Mount Gerizim.” But Jesus knew she was laying a decoy for him. “Those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth.” They get to relate to God as worshippers that he gets to define.

Jesus felt that the solution to her life's brokenness was to identify her or give her a new identity as a worshipper of God in spirit and in truth. No pretence. Once she saw herself in this way, as homo adorans, she was able to say to her neighbours, come meet the one I worship.

Jesus is the new temple of God. And the entry is free. It's costly to him. It's demanding on us. But it's free. At the cross, something amazing happened. The curtain that closed off the holy entry into intimate worship got torn in tow. It's not longer a curtain. It's a door. It's the door of worship.

What is the teaching?

Who gets to define who you are? Who should you let define who you are? Not the world I hope. If the Psalms teach us anything at all, they teach us that man in his essence is a praying, worshipping, life with God relating human being. He is made to share in the divine nature. The only way to do that is for us to throw ourselves with abandon into the worship of God.

We must fight the urge to define ourselves by what we do, by what others say we are or by what we have. It's fine to do, it's great to have a good reputation, it's wonderful to be blessed to have possessions at our disposal. But that's not who we are. We are homo adorns and our posture before God is one of worship. That is our God given identity.

Abraham received a new name when he was taken outdoor and was shown the magnificent creation of God. He must have been overwhelmed. He worshipped and received a new identity. Saul fell to the ground in worship of the one who struck him blind. On his knees he received a new identity: Paul. Saint, servant, ambassador, apostle of God. You and I have received new names, new identities.

When Jesus came out of the water and the Spirit descended on him, he received an identity as the beloved of God in whom God is well pleased. It was a moment of true worship in Spirit and in truth. Our basic identity in our relationship with God is that we worship and he receives our worship.

"Remind Me Who I Am": When I lose my way, And I forget my name, Remind me who I am. In the mirror all I see, Is who I don't wanna be, Remind me who I am. In the loneliest places, When I can't remember what grace is. Tell me once again who I am to You, Who I am to You. Tell me lest I forget who I am to You, That I belong to You. To You. When my heart is like a stone, And I'm running far from home, Remind me who I

am. When I can't receive Your love, Afraid I'll never be enough, Remind me who I am. If I'm Your beloved, Can You help me believe it. I'm the one you love, I'm the one you love, That will be enough, I'm the one you love.

You know all about that question. You ask it of yourself. You may be a mother or a grandmother. You raise kids to follow the Lord. Good. But it's not who you are. You have a husband that you love and respect, a wife that is faithful to you, but that's not who you are.

You enjoy hunting, fishing, singing, writing, exercising, cooking. But you are not these things. You take opportunities to serve others. It's all good. These are important parts of your life and things the Lord wants you to do. But only on one condition. That you would do them from a place of recognizing who I am. I am primarily a worshipper. I exist to bring glory to God and enjoy Him forever.

What else were you created for? In fact, wasn't this what everything was created for? What is the message of the large, full earth all around me, but "worship Him"? Hear it in the songs of birds busy at their darting play; see it in the bowing and bending of trees, waving with the wind; observe the growth and display of a flower, opening to the sun above.

This is our identity. All else has an end. Motherhood will someday be over and marriage doesn't continue past the grave. Singing, writing, exercising, serving . . . all these are temporary. Not unimportant. But not eternal, in and of themselves. They are vehicles. Ways we can worship.

When we start thinking of them as my identity, though, is when we stop living eternity and start seeking stuff of earth to fill us. This is the first step to suffocation. Breath of heaven is the only true oxygen, and any other air is gasping and struggling to get in a lungful. We feel the shallowness in our chest and wonder what is wrong. We know all the right answers and sometimes we just work harder and faster, thinking this is the way to breathe.

But I need a "massive overhaul, a revival to fall." (Caedmon's Call's words from years ago.) All we do -- to become a vehicle again, to find that fresh wind of heaven blowing -- it must start with worship. If the work we are doing is directed from above and fuelled from above, it will be eternal. Work becomes worship. . . . and we feel like we are breathing the oxygen of the presence of God? Let us sing it with the old song, "Take our hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love . . ."

Because a worshipper starts in stillness, but doesn't stay immobile. The hands do move -- but only at the impulse of His love. Mary's heart finds expression in Martha's hands. And this is the place to start any work for the Lord. It starts with Him. On the mountain of the Lord. We can be scrubbing toilets in our bathrooms or flying across oceans to feed orphans . . . both are responses to the call of worship. Both can be done in our own strength and tightening the grip around our neck, making it hard to breathe. Or both can be the wind of heaven blowing oxygen into my soul.

" . . . whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31)