

Climbing the Holy Hill  
Andrew Kneeland, January 29, 2023  
Psalm 15

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let's pray before we look at God's holy Word this morning.

*Father God, thank you for your Word. Bless our time in this holy, special book this morning, and keep us steadfast in your Word. Help keep us attentive, keep our eyes on you this morning. In your name we pray, amen.*

We're going to talk about mountains again today!

Do you remember that we've talked about mountains for a few months now? Back in November we were looking at Isaiah 2, which says: *"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains."*

Mountains were important places back in those days. They were often considered holy places, where gods lived. But the one true God, our God, says that in the last days, the highest mountain will be His mountain, the true and only mountain.

In Isaiah 2 we learned that no other mountain will stand. Not the mountain of politics, the mountain of finance, the mountain of entertainment, the mountain of worry. Only the Mountain of the Lord is truly holy and truly lasting.

And just a few weeks ago we looked at Psalm 24, that mystery story where we found out that there IS somebody who is worthy enough to go up that holy Mountain of the Lord. Someone who IS qualified and able to pave that righteous road and open those heavenly gates. Do you remember who it is? Jesus is worthy! Christ is worthy to climb the hill of the Lord and stand in God's holy place, and Christ is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals.

The Mountain of the Lord is holy, and Christ can climb it to make a way for us to be saved. But now what? What about us, now?

That's what our Psalm is about this morning. Our passage today in Psalm 15—which was originally a song that the people would have regularly sung—is also about God's holy mountain. Just like that prophecy in Isaiah 2 and in Psalm 24, this Psalm begins by asking a question.

Verse 1: *"O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Why shall dwell on your holy hill?"*

Now, this song isn't like our other mountain texts. This song isn't about *becoming*

holy, or first *receiving* forgiveness. This is a song for us believers, helping teach us what to do now that we're saved. Now that we believe and trust in God for our salvation, what do we do?

Here's the first thing, from verses 2 and 3:

*"He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue."*

Now, remember, this whole song is not about how to be saved. We know that salvation is only ever a free gift of God's grace. But this song is teaching us what to do now that we're saved.

And the first thing we see is that justice and truth are important to God. We are instructed to value truth highly. Truth is not just some abstract concept that philosophers quibble about, but **truth** is the very essence of who God is.

Satan is called the Father of Lies. His primary goal is to attack the truth. What Satan does best is attacking the truth claims of God.

The truth that God is real. The truth that God is in control of everything. The truth that God loves us and has a plan for our lives. The truth that we are sinners in desperate need of a Savior. The truth that God sent His only Son into the world to be that Savior and to save the world from their sins.

These are the truths that Satan attacks and Christians are called to defend.

Proverbs 12:19 | *"Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed."*

Jesus Himself said in John 18: "For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

As Christians one element of climbing God's Holy Hill, of living as a Christian, is to value truth highly. Another is to not be swayed by the poor influence of a crowd.

Just because someone says something is true, doesn't make it true. Even if thousands or even millions of people are telling us that something contrary to the Word of God is true, we can't be influenced by an evil crowd. We are called to truth and justice.

God made this clear when He God gave Moses and the Israelites instructions on

Mt. Sinai:

Exodus 23:2 | *“You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice.”*

Truth and justice. Psalm 15 goes on to tell us another part of what it looks like to climb God’s holy hill. Remember, this Mountain of the Lord is the one, true mountain of holiness and righteousness. It’s a mountain that only Jesus was able to climb, the spotless Lamb of God who climbed this holy hill to make a way for us to be forgiven, for us to be restored, and for us to be adopted into God’s holy family.

And now we get to climb this holy hill, following Christ’s footsteps. What else are we to do?

Verses 3 and 4: *“He does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord.”*

**Kindness.** This might seem like an easy one. It’s easy to be kind, at least most of the time. Kindness might be holding the door open for a stranger, baking some brownies for a friend, or spending time with someone when they’re sad.

That’s kindness, but God calls us to a brand of kindness much deeper and much broader than that.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 | *“See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”*

Seek what is good for all people. “All people” includes our friends and those we love, but also our enemies and those who mean us harm.

Jesus said in Matthew 5: *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* How hard is that? To not just pray for our friends and family, but for those who actually hate us? For those who are actively seeking to do us harm?

Jesus says to pray for them, too. Seek what is good for ALL people. Not the sort of kindness you see on greeting cards or among the unbelievers, but a distinctively Christian kindness. A “climbing God’s holy hill” kind of kindness.

The last verses of Psalm 15 tell us another part of what Christian living looks like: *“He who swears to his own hurt and does not change”* - that means someone who is willing to receive harm themselves as opposed to anyone else; a sacrificial, loving attitude. And *“who does not put out his money at interest and*

*does not take a bribe against the innocent.*" This was a big deal in ancient times. Many of the pagan cultures were built on slavery, and a good portion of that slavery came because of unpaid debts. Unjust loans being issued to take advantage of the poorer classes, and exorbitant interest rates being charged to keep the debtors in debt.

We shouldn't do that. God calls for Christians to live differently than those around us. *More* just, *more* fair, we are to be truth-lovers who show kindness to ALL people and don't take advantage of ANYONE, regardless of who they are.

And do you know what we need in order to do what is right, seek truth and justice, and pursue kindness for all people? **True humility.**

It's important to humble ourselves before other people and humble ourselves before God. We are called to live humble lives before other people. That means not being arrogant, considering others before we would consider ourselves, and not taking advantage of situations that were intended to benefit others who are more deserving.

Being humble can be tough, but it's an action and a lifestyle that is produced by the Holy Spirit. It's a fruit of the Spirit and will automatically grow in the hearts and lives of believers who put their trust in God.

Philippians 2 says: *"Do nothing with selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*

We are supposed to be humble toward other people, but also BEFORE GOD. James 4:10 says *"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."*

What does it mean to humble yourself before God? Well, first it means that we should recognize that God is all-powerful and sovereign, and we are not. He has the whole world in His hands, and we do not. He is able to save people from their sin, and we are not.

When we come before God in prayer, we shouldn't be demanding or arrogant. We should respectfully approach the throne of Christ with reverence and humility, because He is perfect, holy, and righteous. And we are not.

And we have the beautiful promise that when we're humble before God, He will exalt us. God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Jesus

said “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

True humility helps us climb this holy hill of Christian living. But you know what? Sometimes we slip. Sometimes we stumble as we climb this holy hill, don’t we?

We’re not always truth-tellers. We’re not always kind to everyone. We’re not always humble.

Even if we try as hard as we can, or practice and train and study for as long as we can, we will still fall well short of the standard of living that God asks for. We will always stumble and trip as we climb up God’s holy hill.

It reminds me of the story of the professional swimmer. Every day he would wake up, eat a healthy breakfast, exercise and lift weights, and then go for a long swim.

Every day that was his routine. Every day he trained his strength, his stamina, and his endurance. He won competitions and was one of the best swimmers in the world. He was very good, and he knew that he was very good.

One day he decided to put his skills to the test. He jumped in the ocean and tried to go as far as he could. The water was smooth and clear and after a long distance he couldn’t help but feel proud of himself, he continued to push farther. When he swam beyond a certain point, he realized that the current had picked up. When he tried to swim he couldn’t make any progress. The harder he tried to swim – the more he relied on his strength, stamina, and endurance – the more exhausted he became. After so much effort he couldn’t move himself an inch.

Our life can be like that, too. We might be proud of how just we are, or of how kind we can be, or of how humble we are. But when trouble hits, we realize how little strength we actually have and how helpless we actually are.

And that’s okay. It’s okay for us to trip as we climb God’s holy hill. It’s okay for us to not be perfect, as long as we have someone to save us who HAS been perfect. We need a perfect Savior.

We need someone who perfectly climbed God’s holy hill. We need Jesus! Jesus perfectly fulfilled every aspect of being a Christian, almost as if it were planned that way from the beginning of the world.

Jesus perfectly displayed **justice** by making legal satisfaction for our sins. God, the Heavenly Judge, doesn’t just brush away or excuse our sins when we come to Him. He took those sins and blamed them on Jesus. The Heavenly Judge was

just.

Jesus was perfectly **kind**, as well. He showed that kindness by coming to us even when we didn't deserve it. We were Christ's enemies, but He loved us. There was no obligation for Jesus to come to earth; for Jesus to join us on Earth as a man and endure all the pain and suffering He endured. But He wanted to because He loved us.

And Jesus was perfectly **humble**. He left the majesty of His heavenly throne room and His perfect union with God the Father in order to be born in a sinful, disgusting world. He left heaven so He could save sinners like us.

Philippians 2:6-8 | *"Jesus, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

Jesus perfectly climbed God's holy hill. Because of that we can climb the holy hill, too! We are enabled and empowered to live lives that reflect the justice, kindness, and humility of Christ. When we believe that Jesus died for our sins, the Holy Spirit works in us and grows within us.

The Mountain of the Lord is holy and perfect, and Christ was the worthy and perfect sacrifice who was able climb it. Now, we can, too.

Only in Christ's power and strength and constant forgiveness. Amen.