

Liturgical Psalms for Epiphany Reflection: Psalm 15 and Psalm 24

Psalms 15 and 24 are liturgical psalms “of David” from Book 1 of the Psalms that were probably used as “entrance liturgies” to Israel’s *worship* of YHWH. Perhaps they were used by priests to teach ancient Israelites about preparation for authentic *worship* of YHWH, probably first in the earlier “tent” setting after David moved the Ark of the Covenant onto Mount Zion, the hill in Jerusalem, and then later in the Temple built in that same place after David’s death. (Ross, *Psalms, Volume I*, pp. 385-395 and pp. 573-589)

1. How do **Psalm 15** and Psalm **24:3-6** provide an “exposition” of **Psalm 1**. Compare Ps. 1:1 and Ps. 15:2.

Psalm 15 might have included “ten things” to remind worshippers also of the Ten Commandments. Find the “ten things” in **Psalm 15**.

How do **Psalms 15** and **24** help **Psalm 1** to “come alive” for you more? What do they add to your understanding of the two ways of life symbolized by the flourishing tree and wasting chaff—the righteous and the wicked?

This flourishing way of life included authentic, wholehearted worship, not phony, hypocritical worship. How did the *ideal worshipper* of **Psalm 15** show his love and devotion to YHWH in his regular everyday life? What specific occasions for sin (independence from God) does **Psalm 15** address? Humbly ask God to keep your heart open to his “ouches” when a truth pricks your heart.

2. Jesus’s ministry definitely included condemnation of the hypocrisy of many of Israel’s spiritual leaders. Both Testaments emphasize worshipping from the heart (real self) and making offerings as acts of trusting dependence on God.

What helps you spot hypocrisy in yourself? Consider how you have seen hypocrisy, among supposed Christians, damage people.

3. Ponder this quote from the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary on Psalms* about qualifying for entrance into the worship space:

Although the psalmist expresses stringent ethical theological qualifications for entry into the sanctuary, the liturgy is not so much a self-righteous declaration of innocence as it is a solemn admission of dependence on the merciful grace of God. Indeed, one who does not have clean hands or a pure heart can restore relationship with God by sincere repentance and the offering of atoning sacrifices. (Longman, *Psalms*, p. 146)

Levite gatekeepers might have used **Psalms 15** or **24:3-6** to remind people of their need for confession of their sins and for atoning sacrifices before worshiping in God's presence in the sanctuary of the "tent" or temple.

Our Anglican Prayers of Confession serve that same purpose. Our 2019 BCP includes three powerful prayers of confession. (BCP, p. 12 in the Daily Office, and p. 112 or 130 before Eucharist.) What is your experience with praying a prayer of confession? How has this changed over time?

Tim Keller summarizes the issue of who gets to draw near to God on p. 21 of *Songs of Jesus*. After exploring God's challenging standard that reminds us that access to God is only through his grace, he writes:

No one but Jesus ever lived with perfect integrity (Hebrews 4:15), but because he is our Savior, we can go into God (Hebrews 4:16).

Remember that the Israelites had no concept of sinless perfection, or no one would have ever been allowed to worship in the tabernacle or temple. Also notice that both **Psalms 15** and **Psalms 24:3-6** describe qualities that are matters of the heart, and no human priest could know whether or not they were present.

What is God using recently to open your heart to desire and receive God's transforming grace as you enter the season of Epiphany?

Here's an example: God used the events of January 6, 2021 to lead to this prayer from a Montgomery, Alabama pastor:

Prayer on This Day of Unrest and Threat

Sovereign God, we are a people divided against ourselves. We watch today the treasure of our democracy under threat—from violence and chaos; from prejudice and hate; from unneighborliness in the extreme.

These forces are not simply "out there;" they lie within each of us as well.

Forgive us for the disrespect and and disregard that mars our life together. Forgive us for our waywardness and sin. Forgive us for anger that rises, causing others to fall. Protect those who are in harm's way, Help those who aid the injured.

Restore us to our rightful minds and to the mind of Christ. In our baptism, we remember who we are: Called to love our neighbors and our enemies, called to seek the welfare of the city, called to defend the vulnerable and to speak truth to power with equal courage and persistence, called to be peacemakers that we might also be called the children of God.

You have told us to not be afraid for we are people of the resurrection not people of death. This is the Good News we have been given. Help us tell it, live it, and make it real here and now.
Amen

4. **Psalm 24** begins in verses 1-2 with God's ownership of the world and everything in it. On what is his authority based? What would it mean to an Ancient Near Easterner to hear that Israel's God founded the earth and world "on the seas...on the waters"? What hope does that capacity of God offer you now?

Then **Psalm 24:3-6**, like **Psalm 15**, reminds would-be worshippers of the entrance requirements for true worship in the presence of YHWH.

5. **Psalm 24** probably relates to the Ark of the Covenant being taken out to battle with the Israelites and then returned to its sacred space in the tabernacle.

Probably two priests, perhaps leading two groups of worshippers, are speaking antiphonally in 24:7-10 of YHWH, Israel's Divine Warrior (whom we Christians now understand eschatologically to be the Returning and Conquering Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.)

Tim Keller observes about Jesus' Incarnation and Crucifixion: "There is no greater beauty than to see the Son of God laying aside his glory and dying for us (Philippians 2:5-11)." (*Songs of Jesus*, p. 43) This is a sober reminder that the way up is down. In Christ, we follow the way of the cross, the cross comes before the crown.

6. Reflecting on **Psalm 24:1-6**, Tim Keller observes:

All money, talent, health, power, and pleasure in the world are God's
But the greatest treasure he can give us is life in his presence. His face—not the gifts of his hands, though they are welcome—is where we find the glory that other things fail to provide. To know his presence, however, is to "ascend" a hill or mountain (verse 3), and doing so is always a struggle. You must repent, seeking a clear conscience (verse 4) And you must wrestle in prayer to seek God's face, as did Jacob (verse 6), who said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

What practices will you experiment with or commit to during this Epiphany season to help you pay attention to how God draws you and others to himself? What "hills" has God placed in your life for you to "ascend" in Epiphany 2021?