

## David's Portrait Of A True Citizen Of Zion.

Text: Psalm 15

Suggested Hymns:

507, 71, 610, 387, 180

- 1) Walks uprightly, Does deeds of righteousness and Speaks the truth
- 2) Does not slander but loves his enemies
- 3) Despises evil
- 4) Honours those who fear the Lord and honours an oath
- 5) Is not involved in usury or bribes
- 6) Concluding thoughts

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 15:1-5, ***<sup>1</sup> LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? <sup>2</sup> He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; <sup>3</sup> He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; <sup>4</sup> In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; <sup>5</sup> He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our psalm begins with the twofold question, ***LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*** In other words, the psalmist proposes to answer the question, *What are the characteristics, the outstanding qualities, of those who are true citizens of Zion, members of the true Church of God? What sort of conduct do they engage in? What is their attitude toward their fellow-men?*

These two questions at the beginning of the psalm announce the topic which David proposes to discuss. That this is an interesting topic, even in our day no one will venture to deny, because nothing seems to be more necessary among the members of the Church than to have their duties, their code of ethics, definitely and unmistakably defined.

In recent years there seems to be so much uncertainty with regard to the essentials of Christian conduct and such a universal ignoring of the fundamental ethical principles that formerly were regarded as altogether self-evident that we should centre our attention these things today.

It is self-evident of course that David is speaking here, not of the way in which we become citizens of Zion, but of our conduct as citizens of Zion.

In other words, he does not tell us how an unconverted person may become a Christian, but how a Christian, who has been converted by the grace of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, should conduct himself toward God and man. Accordingly we do not have here a Gospel-message, but a section of the true code of ethics for the children of God. This is the third use of the Law.

In verses 2-5a David presents what has been called a decalogue of Christian duties in which he shows us in what Christian conduct consists. Let us therefore consider David's portrait of a true citizen of Zion. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. A True Citizen Of Zion Walks Uprightly, Does Deeds Of Righteousness, and Speaks The Truth**

The first qualification of the true citizen of Zion is that he "*walks uprightly.*" As a member of the Church of God, you should be honest and upright in character; not only outwardly, but at heart you should be genuine. You should love that which is good, noble, and beautiful. There should be no deceit and no guile within you. Straightforwardly and fearlessly, you should stand up for what is right and oppose everything that is wrong. You should be a person who can look the world in the eye, being afraid of nothing, because you know that you have nothing to hide. In short, the citizen of Zion should be a person of sterling character.

And if you are a person of sterling character, that character will reveal itself in what you do. According to the psalmist, he "*works righteousness.*" In other words, you always endeavour to do what is right, not only before God, but also in the presence of your neighbour. All unrighteousness, injustice, oppression, dishonesty, double-dealing, craftiness, is an abomination in your sight. This principle is, "*Do to others as you would have others do to you.*" Hence you always treat your fellow-men fairly, just as you desire to be treated by them. In

this way your sterling character reveals itself in an exemplary conduct towards your neighbour.

Another characteristic is this, that he “*speaks the truth in his heart.*” You never lie, never try to deceive your fellow-men, never say anything that is designed to hurt them, but you always speak the truth. Slander is far removed from your thoughts. And this is not merely a matter of policy with you. You tell the truth and refuse to engage in slander, not only because you know that this will not pay in the long run, but because this is the natural thing for you to do. You speak the truth in and from your heart. Having an honest, pure, truthful heart, nothing is more natural for you than to speak the truth. And for this reason your fellow-men trust you and delight to associate with you.

## **2. A True Citizen Of Zion Does Not Slander, But Loves His Enemies**

The psalmist continues, *He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.* Here the psalmist has reference to the sins against the Eighth Commandment, those sins of the tongue by which a man’s good name and reputation are destroyed.

In these sins the citizen of Zion takes no delight. You do not backbite with your tongue. When others speak evil of you and perhaps even persecute you, you do not engage in bitter backbiting, spreading evil reports about your enemies, slandering them, and doing everything in your power to defame them.

No indeed; being truthful at heart, you tell the truth even when you are dealing with those who lie about you. When you are reviled, you do not revile again, but rather follow in the footsteps of your Saviour, who endured all these things with patience and meekness.

And all this is the easier for you because you find no delight in doing evil to your neighbour, not even to your enemy. Not only do you realise that a person gains nothing by harming another person, by repaying evil with evil, but you also have before your eye the example of your Lord and Master, who has commanded you to love your fellow-men, even though they be your enemies.

Scripture tells us in Matthew 5:44-45, *“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray*

*for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”* In view of this exhortation one of the great objectives in your life is to learn to enjoy doing good to others, especially to those who by their conduct have merited nothing but evil.

In accordance with this attitude you also, as the psalmist tells you, do not take up a reproach against your neighbour. Even though others may speak evil about a person, heap condemnation on him, run him down in every possible way, you will not take up a reproach against your neighbour. You will not join in speaking evil about him and slandering him, because that is not in keeping with your character and your principles. On the contrary, you will put the best construction on everything and do everything in your power to defend the persecuted person and to speak well of him.

### **3. A True Citizen Of Zion Despises Evil**

But your attitude toward the wicked is altogether different. In verse 4 David says, *In whose eyes a vile person is despised.* The wicked are an abomination in your sight. If a person hates God and wilfully and continually transgresses His Law, the true citizen of Zion has no sympathy with him. No matter how prominent, how influential, how much admired and celebrated the wicked person may be, in the eyes of the citizen of Zion they amount to nothing. This is simply because they are the enemies of God and indulge in those things which are contrary to God’s holy will. Since God condemns these people the citizen of Zion cannot honour and respect them.

### **4. A True Citizen Of Zion**

#### **Honours Those Who Fear The Lord And Honours An Oath**

The psalmist continues, *But he honors those who fear the LORD.* In the eyes of the true citizen of Zion there is no nobler person than a true child of God, one who is united with God by faith in Jesus Christ and whose life is characterised by love and reverence for the Most High.

In your estimation the humblest Christian, no matter how poor and unlearned he may be, yes, even a little Christian child, stands higher and is worthy of greater honour and reverence than the most powerful princes among the wicked.

In this respect your judgment and your attitudes differ widely from those of the world. You judge people not by their possessions, nor by their influence, nor

by their standing in life, nor by what other people say about them, but by their relation to God and by the judgment which God Himself in His holy Word pronounces upon them. Therefore your point of view is, as nearly as is possible, the point of view of God Himself as He has revealed it to us in the Holy Scriptures.

Since this is the character of the true citizen of Zion, the psalmist adds in the second part of v.4, *He who swears to his own hurt and does not change*. In other words, the citizen of Zion, the devout Christian, stands in awe of an oath. You realise what an oath really is. It is calling upon God to be a witness to the truth and the avenger of an intentional falsehood. In your opinion an oath is an oath. It is binding. It should not be broken. Hence, whenever you take an oath, you will keep it, live up to it, and carry out its promises.

Perjury or breaking a promise you regard as a great sin, a sin on account of which the wrath of God is visited upon the wicked. For this reason you will not break an oath even if you have sworn it to your own disadvantage. Among the children of the world an oath is usually kept only if it proves to be advantageous to the person who has taken it. But not so among Christians. No matter how disadvantageous it turns out to be, no matter what hardships it imposes upon you, you believe that the oath must be kept. Your truthfulness, your faithfulness to God, demands it.

## **5. A True Citizen Of Zion Is Not Involved In Usury Or Bribes**

Finally the psalmist adds the following characteristic of the citizen of Zion, *He who does not put out his money at usury*. The citizen of Zion must not be an usurer. Now, what is an usurer? It is NOT a person one who lends out money at a reasonable rate of interest because there can be nothing dishonourable about that.

An usurer is a person who takes advantage of his neighbour who happens to be in dire distress and who needs money, and needs it badly, but who for some reason or other, cannot obtain it at a reasonable rate of interest and so finally comes to the person in question and asks for help. Then the usurer offers him the money he needs, but at an unreasonable rate of interest. He asks him to pay much more than the money is worth. In fact, he defrauds him.

He becomes guilty of extortion. He makes use of the man's distress to wring out of him a sum of money which he would never be willing to pay if he were not compelled by an emergency to do so. The usurer therefore is a common robber, and a very heartless and cruel one at that. He thrives upon the distress of others, chiefly upon the distress of the poor and needy.

In cases where charity should be practised and love should prevail, he deals with a callous hand and a cruel heart, blighting the lives of the poor and laying heavy crosses upon their shoulders. All this for no other reason than that he is greedy and desires to increase his wealth.

People of this type are not found in the true Church of God. They may be members of a visible church-body, they may have their names on the rosters of congregations, but they are not children of God, members of the true Zion. They are sons of perdition and heirs of everlasting damnation.

And into the same class with the usurer the psalmist puts the person who accepts bribes. Describing the citizen of Zion, he adds the words, *Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent*. When an innocent person is accused of having done wrong, the citizen of Zion will not take a bribe and thus be persuaded to testify against him.

Bribery is contrary to the Christian code of ethics. It is dishonesty. In the first place it is taking money under false pretence, and in the second place it is selling one's honesty and agreeing to do that which is wrong for the sake of filthy gain. Such conduct may appear excusable to the children of the world under certain conditions, but in the Church of God it cannot escape condemnation. No citizen of Zion, no true child of God, dare become guilty of it.

## **6. Concluding Thoughts About A True Citizen Of Zion**

This, then, is the character sketch which David presents to us as a description of a true citizen of Zion. There is nothing theoretical about it. It is concrete, plain, and practical. All that remains to be done by us is that we apply what we have learned to ourselves and try to be in our character and conduct the portrait which the psalmist presents to us here.

No one will deny that there is much room for improvement in this respect in the Christian Church of today. No one who is honest with himself will deny that there is much room for improvement in his own heart and life.

But another sentence remains, a sentence in which the psalmist gives encouragement and a glorious promise to the citizens of Zion who walk in the ways of the Lord. He says, ***He who does these things shall never be moved.*** In other words, the Christian who lives as a Christian will abide in the Tabernacle of the Lord and will dwell in His holy hill. You shall never be removed from the presence of God, not in this life and not in the life to come. God will be with you, and you will be with God. Hence your present life is blessed, and your future is secure.

No matter how tumultuous the times may be and how uncertain and appalling the outlook for the future may appear, you have the rare privilege of joining with David in the closing words of the Twenty-third Psalm, ***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.