

**Who Gets In**  
**Psalm 15 July 18, 2010**

Ok, so I'll warn you upfront – this is a sermon on immigration.

To start with let's look one more time at who gets to immigrate into God's tent.

I want everyone to raise your hands and as you no longer meet the immigration requirements, put your hand down.

*You can get in if walk blamelessly,  
and always do what is right,*

Ok, let's pretend that one doesn't count, so everybody raise your hand again and we'll just start with the next one.

If you don't meet this one put your hand down.

*You get in if you always speak the truth from your heart;*

Ok, this isn't good.

Let's start over again, everybody put your hand back up and we'll pretend that one doesn't count either.

Ok, so now if you don't meet this one put your hand down.

*You get in if you do not insult with your tongue, if you do no evil to your friends, nor take up a criticism against your neighbors; (don't forget the guy who cut you off in traffic last week, or what you had to say about your least favorite political commentator; and we shouldn't even begin to address your hatred of Lebron if you're from Cleveland)*

**Ok, well let's try this one.  
Everybody's hands back up.**

*You get in if you despise the wicked,  
and honor those who fear God;*

**I thought maybe we'd do better on that one;  
you know despising those we don't like and  
all and honoring those who think like us.**

**Ok, let's just finish this up.  
Let's do it a little different.  
Everyone starts with their hands down.  
If you meet the rest of these, then raise your hand.  
So raise your hand if you:**

*always stand by your oath even if it causes you pain and suffering;*

*if you do not lend money at interest, (remember savings accounts or other financial instruments where you earn interest)*

*and those who do not take a bribe against the innocent or, in other words, those who don't profit at the expense of others;*

*like having cheap food and clothing at the expense of child labor and poverty fated farm workers.*

**So I think we get the idea.  
None of us are getting into God's tent.  
Not a single one of us is getting in.**

**Bummer.**

**None of us are gettin' in, so what are we doing here?**

**Well, one thing we should be doing is celebrating the grace of God.**

**The grace of God.**

This grace is not a reference to lack of clumsiness on the part of God.

God's grace is not referring to mealtime prayer that God does or that God gave us to do.

Far from these, the Grace of God is our pass into God's tent.

It's how we get in when we are so incredibly and miserably far from deserving to get in.

You remember that story of the woman who was caught in adultery and they had brought her out to be stoned to death?

The scripture says that the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman before Jesus and after reminding Jesus of the Law that she should be stoned.

They asked Jesus what he thought.

Now this is how I imagine that it went down. At this point Jesus wrote something in the dirt.

The scripture doesn't say what he wrote but I'm guessing that he wrote the word "Psalm."

Alright, well unimpressed the scribes and Pharisees continued to badger him.

Jesus then said let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.

Then he bent over again and wrote something else in the dirt and with that all of her accusers walked away.

What do you think he wrote?

I think he just wrote the number 15.

I think all Jesus had to write in the dirt were the words – Psalm 15,  
the psalm we just read,  
and all those scribes and Pharisees who had the Psalms memorized knew exactly what Jesus was referring to.

Nobody is without sin.

Nobody gets in.

Nobody deserves to get into the Tent.

Nobody deserves to get in, but that's not where the story ends for Jesus;  
the story ends with grace.

The story ends with God's grace.

The story of the woman caught in adultery ends in grace.

Jesus says to her,

“Woman where are they?

Has no one condemned you?”

She replied, “No one sir.”

And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.”

The prodigal son is received with forgiveness and joy.

The shepherd goes and searches for the lost sheep and rejoices when the sheep is found.

**For Jesus, the story ends with God's grace.**

It ends with God's forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption.

It ends with a victory for love.

**No matter who we are or whatever we have done on life's journey, we are still welcomed into God's arms.**

**Not because we deserve it.**

**But because God loves us.**

**But now we are going to shift gears, because everything Jesus taught had two focal points; love of God and love of others; the creation of God's realm in heaven and on earth.**

**For Jesus, Psalm 15 would have the same two focal points.**

God's tent referred to being in God's eternal presence, God's heavenly realm.

But it also referred to building God's realm here.

God's tent also had an earthly referent;  
fulfilling God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

So what does Psalm 15 tell us about who  
belongs in God's earthy tent?  
Who is welcome inside the holy of holies?  
NOBODY.  
Nobody is worthy of entry into God's tent.

How many of you remember that bouncer ad  
that the UCC did a few years back, where  
people are trying to get into church, but like at  
an exclusive night club, the church has a  
couple of bouncers outside ensuring that only  
the worthy got in.  
The punch line of course was that in the UCC  
everybody gets in.

So I want you to imagine that ad, but we going  
to change the ending of it.

So we've got these two bouncers excluding those  
who aren't worthy of getting into God's tent, but  
we notice that they aren't letting anybody in,  
because NOBODY is really worthy of entry into  
God's tent.

Into the scene comes this man, ----  
you know just for fun let's make it a women, and  
we'll call her Christ-ina, yeah Christina.

Christina approaches the bouncers and when they see her they flee.

Christina then proceeds to not only let in everyone who is in line, but she then goes out and gets all those who didn't even think they were invited.

The bouncers understood Psalm 15 and they were just doing their job;  
but one more powerful came;  
one who had a fuller understanding of God's will, God's love, God's grace;  
and soon God's tent began to fill.

Now I'm guessing that so far we're all ok with this image of the church as God's Tent; but Jesus' teachings weren't just directed at the religious structures.

If he just would have stuck to the religious he probably would have died of old age.  
Jesus died because he also addressed the socio-political arenas.  
He wanted to replace the Roman Empire with God's Empire.

So many people want the United States to be a Christian nation.

And we here profess to be building the Realm of God.

If the U.S. is to be a Christian nation, if we are trying to make it into a living Realm of God – then who gets into the tent?

And, on which teaching of Jesus do we base an argument for excluding people from the tent?

Oh there are valid, VALID reasons for excluding people from the tent; no question about it.

But which of those reasons reflect Jesus' teaching?

Or maybe it doesn't really matter what Jesus had to say;

oh, but then maybe none of it really matters, not any of what Jesus had to say about getting into God's tent.

None of it.

God's grace does have a cost.

God wants us to also be graceful.

That is the cost of discipleship.

AMEN.