

The Sovereign King

Psalm 24

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Back in the late 70s and early 80s, Presbyterian pastor D. James Kennedy developed an evangelism program called *Evangelism Explosion* (EE). Not to be outdone, Southern Baptists copied it with their version called *Christian Witness Training* (CWT). They were two really good programs for training people how to share the gospel. The key question in this evangelism program was this: *"If you were to die tonight and stand before God and He asks you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you say to Him?"*

I introduce Psalm 24 with this illustration because that is really the question it asks: *Who can stand before the King?* This is really the ultimate question of what God expects from us. No other question or concern is more important right now than that great question of where we will spend eternity after we die. Psalm 24 causes us to consider this question and answers it for us.

Psalm 24 tells us that God made a way for us to spend eternity with Him in Heaven through the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. As we celebrate Christmas this season, we are reminded of how God made that way possible for us. For the Son of God came in human flesh to save His people from their sin. In his commentary on the *Psalms*, John Calvin writes:

The Son of God, clothed with our flesh, has now appeared as the King of glory and [LORD] of hosts; he has not entered his temple merely by shadows and figures but truly, so that he may dwell in the midst of us.

Calvin reminds us that the King of glory was incarnated in human flesh, lived among us for the purpose of dying for our sins so that we may be saved. Psalm 24 points us to the incarnation of Christ that works itself out in our salvation.

Before we get into our text, let's do a quick overview of Psalm 24. Remember that Psalm 24 forms a trilogy with Psalm 22 and Psalm 23. In Psalm 22, we have a picture of the Suffering King. In Psalm 23, we have a picture of our Shepherd King. Finally, Psalm 24 completes the trilogy by giving us a picture of the Sovereign King. Each Psalm is a different view of the coming Messiah. He is the Savior who suffers in Psalm 22. He is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. Finally, He is the Sovereign King of Psalm 24.

As I have said before, each of these Psalms is beautifully written as a stand-alone text, and that is how we often treat them. We often approach each Psalm as a stand-alone poem/song, and when we do, we fail to understand the context in which it is placed. Working through the Psalms as we are here helps us place them beside one another and get an amazing picture of our Savior as our suffering, shepherding, and sovereign King.

Also, as we come to Psalm 24, we reach the end of a block of Psalms that stretches from Psalm 15 to Psalm 24. If you remember, Psalms 3-14 form a block of Psalms that addresses the *"way of the wicked."* Then Psalms 15-24 address *"the way of the King."*

Psalm 15 and Psalm 24 are like bookends to this section, and so they sound very similar. Listen to Psalm 15:

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does

not change; ⁵ who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

So, you should notice the similarities between these two Psalms as we work through Psalm 24 this morning.

Psalm 24 is one of those Psalms of David that has reverberated across centuries as a hymn of worship, majesty, and anticipation. It is traditionally associated with the bringing of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. So, it was considered a *processional song*. Later, it was sung by worshippers as they progressed into the city and on into the tabernacle or temple. Christians also read it in expectation of Christ's ascension as the victorious King entering His heavenly throne room.

The thing about Psalm 24 is that it moves like a procession. In vv. 1-2: We see the Creator, the King of the world, in His earthly sanctuary that He has created. Then in vv. 3-6, David lays out the moral requirements for those who approach the King. Finally, in vv. 7-10, we see the triumphant entrance of the King of Glory. What this means is that as we walk through Psalm 24, we move from *creation* to *consecration* to *coronation*. This is not simply ancient liturgy; it is the shape of the gospel itself that moves from *creation* to *redemption* to *restoration*.

Psalm 24 teaches us that *Jesus is the mighty King of Glory who has made a way through His perfect life and atonement for His people to enter into God's presence*. I have three points to help us walk through Psalm 24.

I. We belong to the LORD of Creation (vv. 1-2)

Psalm 24 begins with the important truth that the earth is the Lord's. Look at vv. 1-2 with me:

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, ² for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

When we read vv. 1-2, we need to think about the first two chapters of Genesis and the creation account. What we are hearing in poetic language is that the earth not only belongs to the LORD but it is His temple. Everything in Psalm 24 is preparing us to be in the LORD's presence.

David tells us that God owns everything in the world. He owns the inhabitants that live on the dry land. He owns everything that swims or lives in rivers or waters. Everything belongs to the Sovereign Creator King! Every mountain, every ocean, every nation, and every creature. It's not just Israel that belongs to the LORD, but all people everywhere. This includes presidents, kings, governments, adults, children, believers and unbelievers, saints and scoffers. There may be people who proclaim that there is no God and that He has no right or power over them, but they are wrong. They belong to Him by right and ownership.

The LORD is the Sovereign Creator King, and the earth is His sanctuary. It is His temple. It belongs to Him. You may not like the way God runs the world, but newsflash – you're not God. We need to be like Job. After Job tried to indict God for how He ran the world, God answered Job in chapters 38-39 by going back to who created the world, owns it, and runs it. God asked Job in Job 38:4-7,

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

Then, for two chapters, God questions Job about where He was when He created all of the amazing things in the world and the creatures that inhabit it. Then Job answers God in chapter 40:4-5,

"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. ⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further."

But the LORD didn't stop there. He continued to question Job about Job's role in creation for two more chapters. Then in Job 42:2, 5-6, Job answers the LORD again:

"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted . . . ⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Job's response to the Sovereign Creator King is worship. Our worship begins with surrender to knowing who God is and that you belong to Him. We don't come to the LORD as clients who negotiate a deal for salvation. We come to Him as His creatures who humbly stand before their Creator, as subjects before their King, with nothing to offer Him that will earn grace or our salvation.

Now, here's the deal. You may be here this morning, thinking God has no claim on your life. You need to listen to Job's words and surrender your life to Him. You may be here this morning and believe there is no way God could love you because you have gone too far away from Him. You may believe that you have given yourself to some sins that are so horrible that they cause you to believe that there is no way God would love and accept you. Here's what you need to know: *The earth is the LORD's, it is His temple, and all who dwell in it belong to Him.* God created you in His image, and He cares about you.

This leaves us with a very important question: *What does our Sovereign Creator King expect from us? How can we stand before Him and be loved and accepted by Him? How can we come before Him in pure worship of our King?*

II. Who Shall Stand Before the King of Glory? (vv. 3-6)

David asks the right question in vv. 3-6 because he knows God is holy and absolutely pure. He knows God may not be approached lightly or irreverently. God is not our best bud or some kind of heavenly motivational speaker who is committed to our happiness. Let's look at vv. 3-6 again and consider David's question:

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

The scene in Psalm 24 now shifts—from the world as the temple of the LORD to the presence of the LORD in His sanctuary. So, the question is: *If God is Creator, how then can mere humans come into His presence? If we are sinners, then who is worthy to approach Him?*

To answer this question, we must first concentrate on v. 4:

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

When we read v. 4, it should make us more than a little uncomfortable. First, we see that we must have "clean hands." This means our actions must be pure. Literally, it means *our lives and actions must be innocent and free of guilt.* We can't come into the LORD's presence with hands stained by the guilt of our sinful actions.

Second, we must have a "pure heart." To have a *pure heart* means that your motives, thoughts, and emotions are always sinless and holy. You see, it is not enough to be clean or pure on the outside; we must be pure on the inside.

Imagine how horrified we would be if others could see the thoughts that pass through our minds? Yet the reality is that God sees our every thought, even those split-second thoughts or subtle motives that never materialize into action or are never spoken out loud. This is the holy God that owns us and requires that we be holy.

The third and fourth requirements focus on truth. Third, we must “*not lift up our souls to what is false.*” This phrase gets to the idea of idolatry and divided loyalty in the heart. To set the heart on something false means we have divided our loyalty between God and an idol.

The fourth and final requirement means we “*do not swear deceitfully.*” This means we do not practice deceit and divisiveness even in our hearts. We are careful not to spread gossip and lies. Instead, we practice truthfulness in our speech.

When we look at these four requirements in v. 4, we have a problem! Who in the world would dare say they have accomplished this list of requirements perfectly their whole life? When we consider this list of requirements, it should bring us to the end of ourselves by showing us our sin.

Texts like v. 4 remind us of our sinfulness and should prevent us from ever forgetting our guilt before God. Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote:

Above all, let us pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness, guilt, and [how] undeserving [we are of God's grace]. This, after all, is the true secret of a thankful spirit. It is the man who daily feels his debt to grace, and daily remembers [that] in reality he deserves nothing but hell—this is the man who will be daily blessing and praising God. Thankfulness [is] a flower which will never bloom well [except] upon a root of deep humility.

Bishop Ryle is right! The more we see the depth of our sin, the more we'll see the height of God's love for us in Christ and how much we have been forgiven. We'll come to love Jesus more when we see our sin correctly; it will make us hate it all the more and grow our love for Christ's sacrifice on the cross that paid our debt of sin.

When we read the Scriptures, we learn that there is only One who has fulfilled v. 4. There is only One who has ever had perfectly *clean hands, a pure heart, never loved what is false, and never been deceitful*. Only Jesus Christ meets these four requirements.

Here's the good news of Jesus' fulfillment of v. 4. He didn't come to only meet these requirements for Himself. He came to make you and me qualified to come into God's presence.

Now, because of Jesus' perfect work of atonement, by our faith in Him, we can be found in Him. The gifts of vv. 5-6 are not for Christ only, but by our faith in Him, we receive these gifts.

By our faith in Him, we receive His righteousness. The Bible calls this gift of righteousness “*imputation.*” When this happens, our sin is removed from us and *imputed* to Jesus, and His righteousness is *imputed* to us. This means that, by my faith in Christ and repentance of my sin, I am given Christ's righteousness and declared justified, so now I can come into the presence of God and be considered clean and pure, with undivided loyalty and integrity. I can come before the King in the righteousness of Christ.

So the question is: *Have you come to Jesus Christ, the One who lived a perfect life and then died as your substitute on the cross to pay for your sin? Have you confessed Him as LORD and turned from those sins to Him for forgiveness?*

Friends, v. 3 asks, “*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?*” Jesus is the only One who has ever ascended the Hill of the LORD, which is the hill of Calvary. He ascended with clean hands, a pure heart, and undivided obedience to God, and then died to pay for our inability to meet God's requirements. Now, by our faith in Jesus, we can stand with Him in the Holy Place before the King in His blessed righteousness, so that we not only seek the face of the LORD, but also stand in His very presence with clean hands, a pure heart, in worship of our King.

III. Who is the King of Glory? (vv. 7-10)

Now the scene shifts again—from individual worship to a cosmic procession of Christ's triumphal entry into heaven. The gates are a personification of what is happening in heaven. The command to open wide the gates is because the King is arriving. These verses are responsive dialogue, possibly sung as a liturgy. Look at vv. 7-10:

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! ⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah

The picture in vv. 7-10 is Christ ascending Mount Zion, the hill of the Lord, riding up to the gates of the heavenly city as its King. As He rides up to the gates, the herald calls out for the gates to be opened to the King of Kings as He rides in triumph into the Holy City.

It is a heavenly scene reminiscent of Revelation 21:12, where we are told that an angel is assigned to each gate of the New Jerusalem. So, as the herald cries out, “*Lift up your heads, O gates!*” The angel responds, “*Who is the King of glory?*” Then all in the procession cry out, “*The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle!*”

So, how is Jesus Christ *mighty in battle*? Revelation 19:11-16 tells us about this heavenly scene:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is a cosmic and apocalyptic scene in Revelation 19 that actually occurred when Jesus triumphed over death and Hell, and the grave by shedding His blood on the cross for the sins of His people, and proved He could pay for their sins and give them eternal life when He rose victoriously from the dead. By His sinless life, penal substitutionary atoning death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead, the battle was won.

Verses 9-10 repeat the exchange of command, question, and answer as the King continues to approach the gate, only this time v. 10 tells us that the King of glory is the *LORD of hosts, he is the King of Glory!*

The title given to Jesus here, “*LORD of Hosts,*” means He is the “*LORD of Heaven’s Armies.*” Remember Revelation 19:14,

And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

Our King will ride up to the gates of Zion, the heavenly city, with His Hosts, a crowd of His saints following Him, victorious in battle. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, the Apostle Paul tells us:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

I truly hope you are encouraged by these words. Yet, even in their encouragement, they still leave us with a very important question: *When this call goes out for the King to enter His heavenly kingdom, will you be there?* When you stand before the King of Kings, and He asks you: “*Why should I allow you into My Kingdom?*” What will you say to Him? If you want to know how to answer this question, please come and see me after the service.