
The Pilgrims' Ascending King

Psalm 24

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Introduction

Eric Thompson loves the St. Louis Cardinals. With his team in the World Series this Fall he was glued to the TV. But something happened to get him away from the TV. I called him on a Sunday afternoon just to see how things were. "Where were you this morning" I asked. His answer I was not ready for. "Dan, you will never guess. Laural bought a ticket for me and my brother-in-law to get us into Busch Stadium for game 3. Nobody gets into the stadium for a World Series game at this time in the season. And yet, Laural accomplished something I could never have done. She got us in to the ballpark to witness greatness".

If you know about game 3 of this year's World Series, you know what he was talking about. It was this game that the St. Louis Cardinals beat the Red Sox, 5-4, on Saturday night at Busch Stadium with one of the most bizarre plays ever to end a World Series game. At the end of the game, Eric told me that the out breaking of celebration was so loud he could not even hear himself think.

When I got off the phone it occurred to me. Eric was given access into the place in which greatness showed up and experienced a lifting up of affection and voices and applause to the greatness that showed up. My mind traveled to the gospel. (transition into thesis)

Big Idea

King Jesus gives (by way of the Cross) access into His presence of glory and allows his people to experience an exuberant celebration over His greatness as He is glorified in their presence and they are satisfied in His presence.

This is what we find in our passage for this morning. Please turn with me to Psalm 24. This message is all about the pilgrims' ascending king. And to see him in Ps.24 we must begin with a bit of historical context and the structure of the psalm.

Historical context

The historical context for Ps.24 is pilgrimage to Jerusalem out of exile in foreign lands. The Jews due to unbelief and rebellion were taken out of their homeland by King Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon. For 70 years the Israelites were under a foreign king in a foreign land. Did this mean that the plan God had for Adam and Noah and Abraham and Moses and David was canceled? Did God break His promise so that His people had no hope? - a promise to create a people who know Him in a place of blessing with the glorious King who extends this glory and blessing to cover the entire world through them? Was that promise nullified by the awful effects of sin and the terrible consequences of the Babylonian captivity?

The LORD who never breaks His Word raised up a Persian King named Cyrus to deliver His people out of bondage and send them back to their homeland and settle them in Jeru-

salem at the Temple; a holy place in which God's people could meet with God and not perish but experience life indeed.

So we have the pilgrimage of God's people (the Israelites) coming back to God's presence (the Temple) in God's place (Israel). This is the setting for Psalm 24 and this sets us up to gaze upon the pilgrims' ascending King. Take a look as I read for us

Psalm 24

1 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.

3 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

7 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 Pilgrims' Ascending King

This passage and message are about the pilgrims' ascending King. There are three observations we will make in our time together regarding this King.

1. He is out of this world. (Point: GREATNESS)
2. He requires admission into His presence. (Point: GRACE)
3. He receives exuberant celebration from His people. (Point: GLORY)

When you leave here this morning, I hope your imagination is filled with images of the ascending King – I want your mind to be filled with His majesty, mercy and love. Let's aim toward this as we pray and then look at v1-2.

Is out of this world (i.e. greatness)

v1-2

In v1-2 we come to creation terminology. In v1-2 we see that the pilgrims' ascending king made this physical world. In Ps.19 we observe that creation is this King's non-verbal communication on His majesty. In fact, Ps.8 tells us that this utterly impressive and complex physical world was the mere work of His fingers. Step out this week into a clear crisp night and look up. To think that for this King it was just child's play to create the world in which we live - A world where you can look up into the night and there floats "twinkle-twinkle little star" known as Alpha Centauri, a star system in the Milky Way seen from where you live that is actually about 4.5 light years away (one light yr. is about 6 trillion miles). And this galaxy in which you live shares residents with over 200 million other galaxies in the universe. Then zoom in to Earth; a mere piece of sod flung through space while spinning seemingly out of control and yet brilliantly not on which we hear wind blowing and see snowflakes falling and watch trees and seasons changing and birds flying and babies crawling on the carpet and lovers smiling at each other.

This world is confounding. This world is created. This world is owned by this King we are exploring this morning.

The point of v1-2 is clear. The pilgrims' ascending King is simply out of this world great! But it's here that the shift in the poem is felt. We leave the lofty creator and move now to his creature. Entering in the King's presence seems now to be the issue. With the thought of actually coming into His presence, how does that make you feel? Vulnerable? Exposed? Defenseless? How do you approach the King of glory? In what way are we able to enter into His presence? The answer is found in v3-6.

Requires admission into His presence (i.e. grace)

v3-6

The pilgrims' ascending King requires admission into his presence.

Requiring perfection

v3-4

According to v3-4, to enter into His presence requires perfection. Look back down at your Bibles. The questions submitted to the reader are chilling. "who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? An Old Testament Jew would have shuddered at the thought of waltzing into the Temple and into the holy place to see the greatness of God. They knew they would be dead on the spot if they tried such a thing. Entrance requires perfection. And this passage talks about the perfection as clean hands and pure hearts.

Think with me over the time this Psalm was originally written. The ark of the LORD was rescued from the Philistines by King David. It was taken up to Jerusalem and put back into the holy of holies in the Tabernacle. My question for us is: could King David enter into the holy place and gaze upon the greatness of God? Take a look at his heart. What did he do in his heart with Bathsheba? Adultery was found deep in his heart. And what did he do with his hands after this sin? To cover his tracks he killed Bathsheba's husband. And so, with blood on his hands and adultery in his heart King David could never approach the Lord of glory.

How about you.... We see in these verses a perfect standard that addresses both outward behavior and inward motives. (Matt. 5:7; 1 Sam. 16v7)

In the New Testament Jesus said about murder and adultery that it starts in the heart. Are you angry with anyone? Do you want something or someone that God says is off limits and will be trespassing if you try to grab it?

You see all of us are guilty. None of us can stand upon v3-4 as the basis for entrance into the presence of the King. We all have lifted our hearts to worthless things and made much of creation and despised the Creator. Is there any hope for us? Grace is found in v 5-6.

Receiving provision

v5-6

In these verses we come across the repetition of the phrase “from the LORD/ from the God of his salvation”. Do you see that in verse 5? The pilgrims cannot earn their way into the presence of the Lord. It is all by grace. Instead, they must receive His provision; the provision of blessing and righteousness. And how did He provide for us? V.5-6 hint/point at the gospel of Jesus Christ made plain in the New Testament. Listen to just two verses out of the New Testament to help you to understand v5-6.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12)

Here is where greatness and grace kiss. Here we find the Lord of glory going to the Cross to shed His blood in order to wash away all filth of sin belonging to all who turn from the sins and trust Him for salvation. Here we see Christ's resurrection. He ascended into the Temple in heaven. Here we see Him as our high priest providing access to the holy of holies. Here is our hope. And there is no other way by which we can approach the blazing center of the greatness of our God.

Oh bow to Him you who hear these words. Believe on Him you who have unclean hands and hearts. Receive the gift of righteousness through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once the pilgrims received these gifts the declaration of “you are blessed / you are righteous” gave them permission to enter into God’s presence. And what happens then? Allow your eyes to dance upon v7-10.

Receives exuberant celebration from His people (i.e. glory) v7-10

The Pilgrims' ascending King receives exuberant celebration from His people. Take a listen as I read once more v7-10.

7 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

Having gained admission into the presence of greatness his people experience two things.

Building up of joyful anticipation

First, they experience a building up of joyful anticipation. The questions in v8,10 are not asking for identity. These verses are a composition that is sung responsively. That is, one side of the group of pilgrims would sing the question and the others side would sing the answer. These verses have a tone of military power and victory. They knew the King was best. They knew the King was the victor. They knew they were on the winning side. This went on for a time; back and forth they would sing these words responsively. (Not unlike what we find at a sporting event. "Who is the best in the land"? "Springboro Panthers" "Springboro Panthers". The chant would repeat before the basketball players come out onto the court. Why would they do this? The fans can hardly wait to see their players and to enjoy the greatness of the event).

Breaking out in glorious celebration

v10b

Now transpose this example up and onto the King of the Universe whose military power crushes the head of the enemy and puts to death all that threaten His people. The building up of anticipation breaks out in v10b in glorious celebration. Are you starting to see Jesus? Are you beginning to see how Ps.24 functions for the church?

Can you experientially understand the gospel and how Christ defeated your penalty due your sin by dying on the cross and then raised to life to enter the heavenly temple to represent you so that you have Him now in the earthly temple (the church) and a magnificent future awaiting you; an eternal time in eternity to see and savor Christ in all His splendor.

The King we are looking at in Ps. 24 has provided access into this expectant hope and joy to see the glorious warrior King who comes to his worshipping people.

Imagine with me fully safe due to His provision you find yourself in a place and Jesus Christ enters “as a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters...his face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev.1:13f). and you and millions of others have the capacity and power to pleasure in the ascending King for ever and ever.

Because of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection and ascension and second coming Psalm 24 helps us to see the gospel – salvation for hell-deserving sinners through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

How shall we close such a sublime Psalm as 24?

As the worship team comes to close our gathering this morning please stand with me and together we will read the summary of this message.

(recite audibly in unison with the church the summary of message and pray it over the church)

King Jesus

(by way of the Cross)

gives access into His glorious presence

and allows his people to experience an exuberant celebration over His greatness

as He is glorified in their presence and they are satisfied in His presence.