

Psalm 24      “The King of Glory”  
Psalm 24  
Hebrews 12

April 23, 2023

Psalms 20-24 have brought us through a sequence of songs about the kingdom.

Psalm 20 started by asking the LORD to send help from the sanctuary  
in order to deliver the Messiah – the LORD’s anointed king.

Psalm 21 then is the song of praise as the Messiah celebrates God’s salvation.

Psalm 22 is the song of the suffering Messiah

as he passes through death into life everlasting –

and there is a way in which Psalm 22 captures *all these themes* –

because Psalm 22 says “All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD,

and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.” (v27-28)

The Kingship of God and the kingship of his Messiah

is ultimately about the nations coming to worship the LORD.

Psalm 23 then says that the King – the Messiah – looks to the LORD as his shepherd –  
and will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

So when you hear in Psalm 24 – “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?”

Psalms 20-23 have set you up to think – the Son of David? The Messiah!  
The one whom God delivers from death and exalts to his right hand?

And, of course, immediately before all this we heard Psalm 18 –  
with its celebration of God’s deliverance of David –  
and Psalm 19 – with its celebration of God’s law from the heavens.

So think about it this way:

Psalm 19 – “the heavens declare the glory of God”

Psalm 24 – “the earth is the LORD’s”

(And yes, if you keep going you’ll find Psalm 29 –  
where the heavens, the earth, and the waters all give glory to God!)

Psalm 25 – Keeping God’s Covenant

The theme of dwelling in the house of the LORD will take over in Psalms 26-30,

Psalm 26 – I Love the Habitation of Your House

Psalm 27 – One Thing: That I May Dwell in the House of the LORD

Psalm 28 – I Lift My Hands Toward Your Sanctuary

Psalm 29 – the Voice of the LORD in the Temple

Psalm 30 – “A Song at the Dedication of the Temple”

Sing Psalm 24  
Read Hebrews 12:1-29

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
Who shall stand in his holy place?

Jesus.

And because Jesus has ascended the hill of the LORD –  
because Jesus stands in the holy place –  
therefore *we* come, not to an earthly mountain –  
but to the heavenly Mt. Zion!

Children –  
do you know where you are?

You may think, “I’m at church” –  
and yes, you are at church!  
But what does that mean?

Hebrews tells us that we have come to Mt. Zion, to the city of the living God.  
You have come to the heavenly Jerusalem!

And what we do here on Sunday morning is reminding us of that!  
You have come to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.  
That’s *you*.

When we come together on the Lord’s Day –  
we come to meet with the Triune God!  
And we gather with a few of God’s people physically –  
because we gather with the whole church of the firstborn – all of God’s people –  
in the heavenlies.

Some would say,  
“Oh, but pastor, Hebrews 12 is talking about who we are in Christ –  
this is everyday – not just on Sunday!”

And that’s true!  
This is every day!  
And that’s why seeing it on Sunday is so important!  
If we don’t see it here –  
where we are gathered with God’s people in his presence –  
why would we expect to see it any place else?

But every Sunday, we gather – we ascend the hill of the LORD –  
as we come to Jesus – the mediator of a new covenant –  
and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Because the most important thing for you – is to see Jesus.  
When we come together to worship the triune God,  
you need to see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Now what’s interesting is that in the LXX – the Greek translation of the OT –  
there is an additional line in the title:  
“for the first day of the week” –  
which suggests that Psalm 24 was used in the temple liturgy on the first day of the week.

If so, then those were some pretty insightful priests!  
Because Psalm 24 is all about how the King of Glory enters the holy place!

The key word to Psalm 24 is the word “lift.”  
There is an upward movement to the whole Psalm  
with its rising images of ascending and lifting.

You can see it clearly in verse 4  
“he who does not lift up his soul to what is false”  
and of course the refrain in verses 7 and 9  
uses the verb four times:  
“Lift up your heads, O gates,  
and be lifted up, O ancient doors.”

But there is one more usage – in verse 5.  
When it says, “He will receive blessing from the LORD” –  
it actually reads, “he will lift up blessings from the LORD.”

This word has a wide range of meanings,  
and so it is rightly translated “he will receive” –  
but this particular usage calls attention to the connection  
between the one who does not lift up his soul to what is false,  
and the one who will lift up blessings from the LORD.

This verb is also used in the third commandment:  
“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”  
Literally, “You shall not lift up the name of the LORD your God in vain.”

The whole point of the Psalm is focused on getting from earth to heaven –  
from the problem of the lack of pure hearts  
to the ascent of the King of Glory into the holy place.

**1. “The Earth Is the LORD’s”: Belonging to God (24:1-2)**

*24:1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, [and all that fills it]  
the world and those who dwell therein,  
2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*

When we hear “the earth is the Lord’s”  
we tend to think in terms of “planet earth,”  
but when an Israelite heard, “ha-aretz”  
he remembered how God created the three realms:

the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

The earth does not refer to a “planet”  
but to the dry land.  
(Genesis 1:10 – God called the dry land “earth” and the waters he called “seas”)

And you see this same worldview in play in verse 2 –  
that God has founded the earth upon the seas.

Genesis portrays a three-story universe:  
the heavens above  
the earth beneath  
and the waters under the earth.

In Psalm 19 we saw that the heavens proclaim the glory of God.  
Now, Psalm 24 is saying that the dry land –  
the place where humans dwell –  
belongs to Yahweh.

Throughout Genesis 1-2 there is a strong emphasis on the “earth”  
as belonging to God – responding to God – submitting to God.

And then in the Flood, God drowns the earth (the dry land) –  
as the word “aretz” is used 49 times during the flood narrative!  
(And in Psalm 29 we’ll hear the only reference to the word “flood”  
outside of Genesis 6-10!)

But the “earth” also refers to the nations:  
in Genesis 10 “aretz” refers to the particular lands of the nations.

So aretz can speak of the whole of the dry land –  
or any particular part of the dry land that belongs to a particular nation.

In Genesis 12:1 God says to Abraham,

go forth from your father's house, and go to the *eretz* that I will show you.

Go to the "earth" – the particular piece of dry land – that I will give you.

And every time that you hear about the "land of Canaan" in Genesis,  
it is the "ha-aretz" of Canaan.

The Promised Land is the promised "eretz."  
In the beginning God created the heavens and the eretz.  
And God promised to Abraham an "eretz."

But not only does the earth belong to the LORD,  
also the *world* and those who dwell therein.

The world-dwellers of Psalm 24:1 belong to God.

This confirms that we are talking about the inhabited world.

This also sets us up for what Paul does in Romans 4 –  
because Paul says that the promise to Abraham and to his offspring  
was that he would be heir of the world –  
the cosmos.

What were the three parts of the promise to Abraham?  
The land, and the seed, and the blessing to the nations.

When we think of *the land* we often think simply of the land of Canaan – the promised land.  
But Paul says that the promise was bigger than that!

After all, if *all nations* will be blessed through the seed of Abraham –  
then the promise to Abraham's seed is that he would be heir of the world!

Verse 2 then sounds a little strange to our ears:  
he has founded it upon the seas makes sense from an ancient perspective  
(after all, the seas are the lower storey of the universe –  
think of Psalm 136:6 – "who spread out the earth upon the waters"),  
but no one in the ancient world believed that the land was built upon rivers!

Everyone knew that rivers flowed over the earth!

So what's going on?

Remember Genesis 2?  
There were four rivers in Genesis 2.  
These rivers water the whole earth.

Think of subterranean fountains bubbling up from below.  
The existence of subterranean rivers that sometimes burst forth from below  
would tend to support the ancient notion that the earth is founded upon rivers.

So verses 1-2 tell us that all the inhabitants of the earth  
belong to God.

But the fact that everyone belongs to God only heightens our discomfort with reality.  
If everyone and everything belongs to God –  
it's pretty obvious that not everything and everyone is acting like it!  
If everyone belongs to God,  
who can ascend to the LORD?

(We just finished a series in the evening service on Leviticus –  
and Leviticus is *all about* this question – see Michael Morales book!)

## 2. “Who Shall Ascend?” Seeking the Face of God (24:3-6)

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.*

If verses 1-2 focus upon the earth and how the earth is founded upon the seas,  
verse 3 turns our eyes upwards.

While ostensibly the “hill of the LORD” is on earth,  
the earthly Jerusalem – the earthly sanctuary –  
was designed as a picture of God’s heavenly dwelling place.

As we saw in Leviticus,  
standing in the holy place was standing before God –  
coming into the presence of the LORD.

But the focus here is upon the one who may ascend the hill of the LORD.

Notice the very *singular* emphasis here.

Some have speculated regarding how this Psalm was used.  
Some have suggested that it could have been used for the enthronement of the king.  
Others have claimed that it was used for an annual ‘enthronement’ ceremony  
where the ark of the covenant was brought out  
and then taken back into the holy of holies.

But such speculations are not especially useful.

More helpful is the title given by the LXX – “for the first day of the week” –  
because that tells us how the priests used Psalm 24!

The priests used Psalm 24 on the first day of the week –

because the first day of the week is the day after the seventh day!  
On the seventh day, man is supposed to enter God's rest.  
But then the seventh day ends – and we have still not entered God's rest!  
There must be another day (as Hebrews says).  
There must be an eighth day – the first day of a new creation.  
And that is what Psalm 24 is all about!

The *point* of the Psalm is that there is only one who can enter God's rest.  
*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.*

In other words, his outward conformity to God's law  
is matched by his inward conformity to God himself!

He does not lift up his soul to what is false.  
The soul refers to the deepest, most intimate sense of *who you are*.  
He does not lift up his soul to emptiness.  
God said in the third commandment,  
“you shall not lift up the name of the LORD your God to falsehood”  
I know – we usually translate it, “you shall take the name of the LORD your God in vain”

But Psalm 24 is playing off of the third commandment –  
In the same way that you should not lift the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
so also you should not lift up *yourself* to what is vain –  
to what is empty!

Our fundamental problem is that we lift up our souls to that which is empty!  
We want to be full!  
We want meaning and purpose and happiness in our lives!!  
But we keep expecting fulfillment from that which is empty.

The empty and the deceitful will always leave us empty and deceived.  
And this is why the use of the same verb in verse 5 is so important:  
He has not lifted up his soul to vanity – but instead:  
“he shall *lift up* a blessing from the LORD”

Notice the difference!  
When we lift up our souls to vanity – we are pursuing our glorious agenda  
(which turns out to be empty and deceitful);  
But when we lift up a blessing from the LORD –  
we are receiving the kingdom of God!

As we went through Leviticus we were challenged to think differently about *holiness*.

We sometimes can be tempted to think of the “holy” as a besieged citadel.

But one commentator has raised a good question:

“If the world contains relatively small pockets of holiness,  
like a hill of the Lord or a temple, surrounded by vast areas of unholiness,  
like (presumably) everywhere else,  
and if the unholy has the power to contaminate the holy  
but the holy does not have the power to infect [or decontaminate] the unholy,  
what future, I ask myself, is there for the holy?

The holy is rather under threat, is it not,  
if it has to be protected from the unholy by the exclusion of unrighteous people  
from visiting the sanctuary.

For if impure people are supposed to be kept out of the shrine, or keep themselves out,  
in order to protect its holiness,

what happens if impure people are inadvertently allowed in?

Does the holy thereby become unholy?” (David J. A. Clines, 3)

This is, in one sense, the fundamental question of the Old Testament.

If the vast majority of people are unclean –  
and the unclean contaminates the holy –  
then the holy will never survive.

But this is the marvelous message of the gospel that comes to us in Jesus Christ.

The holiness of Jesus is such that he decontaminates the unclean.

When Jesus touches lepers, he does not become unclean,  
they become clean!

His is the holiness that Psalm 24 longs for!

A holiness that *cannot* be corrupted!

And this is why understanding verse six is so important:

*6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah*

Except, in Hebrew, the word “God” isn’t there!  
(literally, this generation is seeking him,  
they are seeking your face, O Jacob)

This is seen as such a strange statement  
that most interpreters follow the Septuagint,  
“who seek the face of the God of Jacob.”

But what would it mean to seek the face of Jacob?

In Genesis Jacob is said to be “a blameless man.” (25:27)

Most modern commentators don’t agree,  
that doesn’t change what the text says!!



(And most ancient commentators had no difficulty seeing that Jacob was blameless!)

But if you think of Jacob as a blameless man –  
and you are talking about one who turns away from idolatry  
and does not swear deceitfully,  
well, that's Jacob!

And so this generation is seeking the face of Jacob.

And when this one comes –  
*he will receive blessing from Yahweh and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

When the king like Jacob comes, the blessing of Jacob will come.  
Remember the blessing of Jacob upon his sons?  
Jacob had spoken of how the scepter would not depart from Judah  
until the one came to whom it belonged.

So maybe Psalm 24 was sung for every new son of David who ascended the throne:  
(will this be the one?)  
Or maybe it was sung to symbolize the ascension of God to his throne  
(which would only heighten the disjunction between the holiness of God  
and the uncleanness of everyone else!).

The point is the same:

When this blameless man comes –  
when the one with clean hands and pure heart comes –  
then *he* will lift up (or receive) blessing from Yahweh  
he will lift up (or receive) righteousness from the God of his salvation.

It's what Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16 regarding the mystery of godliness:  
“He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

The resurrection of Jesus was his *vindication* – his justification –  
it was when Jesus was declared righteous.

Of course, the difference between Christ's justification and ours  
is that Christ was declared righteous because he *was* righteous!  
Whereas we are declared righteous not because *we* are righteous,  
but because *he* is righteous,  
and his righteousness is imputed to us!

So this second section of Psalm 24 shows us our need for the *one* whose hands are clean –  
the one who receives blessing and righteousness from God.

You might think that this is the end of the story!  
What more do we need?  
Well, it is not enough for Jesus to be righteous!  
It is not enough for *him* to enter the holy place.  
After all, where does that leave us?

There is a further problem here.  
We have seen that the earth – the *eretz* belongs to God –  
and yet these things and these people that belong to God  
are not holy –  
they are not able to come up and ascend into his holy place.

And so the further problem is that at least some of these people who belong to God  
are not just unclean –  
they are his enemies who must be conquered –  
that is plainly seen in the third stanza,  
which speaks of how the King of Glory must conquer his enemies in battle.

### **3. “Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!” Seeing the Coming of the King of Glory (24:7-10)**

*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!*

The King of glory is a warrior – a “gibor” – a “mighty man.”

This language often makes modern people uncomfortable.

We don’t like thinking of God as a warrior – as a mighty man.

And we don’t like thinking of the triumph of God in such crassly physical terms.

But Psalm 24 calls us to see our King of glory as the strong and mighty one.

He is the one who goes out to battle against all his and our foes,  
and he is the one who wins the battle!

Our Shorter Catechism asks, “how does Christ execute the office of a king?”

The first part of the answer is:

“Christ executes the office of a king by subduing us to himself.”

How often do you think of Christ’s rule in your life?

Do you think of Christ as the mighty warrior who comes and subdues *you!*

We are more used to the rest:

“in ruling and defending us,  
and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”

But we usually think of Christ’s conquering in bland “spiritual” terms.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is KING!  
And as the King of Glory,  
    Jesus rules over the nations of the earth.  
His sway is spiritual –  
    if you mean by that, that he rules by his Spirit –  
    but *our* weapon is the Sword of the Spirit – which is the word of God.  
All church power is ministerial and declarative.

And it is true that Christ's only weapon is his word.  
But the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword –  
    and when the word of God is wielded by the one who *is* the Word made flesh,  
    then when King Jesus speaks – it happens.

In a few weeks we'll come to Psalm 29:4-5  
*The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.  
The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

When the voice of the LORD speaks, all the earth trembles before him.  
And so when King Jesus speaks,  
    his word can literally overthrow kingdoms,  
    strike people dead on the spot,  
    and bring destruction on the earth!

Verses 9-10 then echo verses 7-8,

*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 difference between verses 7-8 and 9-10 is slight.  
In verse 7 the ancient doors are to “be lifted up”  
    while in verse 9 the ancient doors now are to do the lifting.  
And in verse 8 the discussion of the King of Glory  
    focuses on the might and prowess of Yahweh in battle,  
    whereas in verse 10 the focus is on the *person* of Yahweh of Hosts.

What comes to the fore very clearly, then,  
    is that humanity's only hope –  
    Israel's only hope –  
    is if Yahweh himself comes as the King of glory  
    who will fulfill all that was promised to Jacob.

Now, this phrase “the king of glory” is almost unique here.  
    nowhere else in the OT do you find the title “king of glory.”

The only place where you get a similar phrase is in the NT – in 1 Corinthians 2,  
where Paul speaks of Christ as the “Lord of glory.”

When Paul says that “Jesus is Lord” he is affirming the Kingship of Christ.  
So when Paul speaks of the “Lord of glory”  
he is at least alluding to Psalm 24.

Paul is saying that Jesus has come as the conquering King of glory –  
and his conquest has come about through a most unusual victory:  
the crucifixion of the king.

Because it was only when the King of Glory took upon himself the uncleanness of his people  
that his holiness could “decontaminate” us.

And so *we* sing Psalm 24 as those who sing the glory of the triumphant king  
as he ascends to the right hand of the Father.

For us there is a definite moment in the liturgy of heaven when this song is sung:  
it is virtually identical in content to Revelation 5,  
Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may enter his holy place?

Only the conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah –  
only the Lamb who was slain –  
he is the King of glory who ascends in glorious triumph  
to the throne of God.

He is the King of Glory!

Where are you in Psalm 24?

Sure – you are found in verse one.  
You are one “those who dwell” in the world.  
You are one who belongs to God.  
That is important.

You are *not* the “one who has clean hands and pure heart” –  
at least not in yourself.  
But in Christ that can truly be said of you.

And certainly it is supposed to be true of you more and more each day.

But there is one more place where you are found in Psalm 24.  
And this is the most important place.

*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

You are the temple where Christ dwells.  
You are the dwelling place of the Lord of glory.

When the King of glory comes, the gates of his holy temple *will* open –  
When the King of glory comes,  
his temple rejoices at his approach and so throws wide the gates  
to welcome the conquering King of glory.

And even this day,  
we meet with the triumphant King of glory.  
Even this night we behold the coming of the King  
as he rides in victory to his temple!

Because of the holiness of the King –  
because *he* has lifted up blessing from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God of his salvation,  
therefore you are being built into that holy place –  
as living stones into a suitable dwelling place for the LORD!