

Summer Psalms

*“Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

The Progression of Praise

August 11th, 2024

Psalm 24

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Good morning, everyone. It is good to be with you all this morning. If you have a Bible with you, would you please open it now to Psalm 24. We are spending our time together in August going through various Psalms. One of our goals this month is to see how the Psalms equip and empower us to live out the Sermon on the Mount. The Psalms meet us where we are at in the various seasons of life. Last week we spent some time looking at how Psalm 77 meets us in the valleys of life. Psalm 77 comes to us in our pain, kneels down beside us, wraps its arm around us in comfort and empathy, and then it lifts our heads up beyond ourselves to see the path forward. Today we are continuing that trajectory. We are looking at a Psalm that causes us to look up.

There are numerous reasons why we look up. Sometimes, like we saw last week, we look up because we are in need. Children are a great example of how and why we look up. When Eleanor falls and scrapes her knee, she looks up to me in tears for comfort and help. Other times I enter the house and she runs to me in excitement and joy reaching for me to pick her up because she loves me and wants to be with me.

Last week we looked up to God because of our NEED and this week we are looking up to God because of our LOVE. We are looking at him through the lens of Psalm 24 in AWE, WONDER, and ADORATION. No matter where we are at in life, this psalm invites us to behold and

worship our king of glory. We will see that clearly communicated as we turn our attention to the text this morning.

Hear now the Word of the Lord from Psalm 24.

“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!” (Psalm 24:1-10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 24 is a Psalm written by David, other than that, we don't know too much about it. Many commentators ascribe it to David bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem after defeating the Philistines in 1 Chronicles 13-16. Others ascribe it to David returning to Jerusalem after the Lord gave him victory in battle over the enemies. Whatever the specific context was, the focus and emphasis of this Psalm is on the WONDER and MIGHT of the King of Glory. The language is intentionally vague to apply to every triumphant moment of God.

It is important to remember that as we read the Bible, we are also people who live in the 21st century, and we cannot read the Psalms as if the New Testament doesn't exist, or as if Jesus never came. I love the way that Plumer captures this idea when he writes:

“The removal of the ark to mount Zion was a dull affair compared with Christ’s ascension to heaven; and his ascension to heaven as seen from earth was as nothing, compared with his second coming, although this shall be *in like manner*. Nor shall the *final* judgment present the last grand spectacle that shall be witnessed by the redeemed. It will be but the beginning of unceasing wonders.”¹

Regardless of whether this Psalm was written for the return of the Ark to mount Zion in Jerusalem, or for another triumphant procession, it applies to all of them. It applies to EVERY TRIUMPHANT MOMENT OF GOD. The Ark coming home was a foretaste of the coming of Jesus and his Ascension to his rightful place, which is a foretaste of his second coming, which is the BEGINNING OF UNCEASING WONDERS.

This Psalm meets us WHEREVER we are at. It reminds us to pause, to look up, to consider the wonder and majesty of God. It does that by working through a progression. It lays out the foundation of God as creator, it asks an all-important question, which it then answers, and it finally provides a response to all that we have seen in the question and answer. So those are the four things we are going to observe and unpack in Psalm 24 this morning. The first of these is, of course:

The Foundation

In verses 1 and 2, the Psalmist clearly lays out the foundational principle that undergirds and shapes everything else we see in this Psalm. Just like a foundation of building outlines the shape and supports the rest of the building. Verses 1 and 2 shape and guide everything that follows. In verses 1 and 2 we see that:

¹ William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), 328.

“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.” (Psalm 24:1-2 ESV)

David begins this Psalm by laying out the most fundamental truth there is. God is the creator of everything, of the world and all that is in it. It is HIS. This is the exact proclamation at the beginning of the Bible.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

God is the creator. There is no more important truth than that! This is the base level, the foundational truth, that informs ALL OTHERS. God is the creator and, as the creator, he has all authority over his creation. He is God. We are not. End of Story.

Tremper Longman is helpful here:

“The psalmist begins with a hearty affirmation that everything, animate and inanimate, belongs to the Lord. He owns everything and everyone, and everything and everyone are completely dependent on him. After all, according to the psalmist in verse 2, God created everything and everyone. He thus has authority over all.”²

God is the creator. He has ALL the rights. And he is the KING. This is the foundational truth of not only this Psalm but of EVERY PSALM, of every chapter, and every verse of the Bible. God is King! He is the glorious creator of all things. He knows every hair on your head, every cell, every molecule, every subatomic particle that exists he knows, and he rules over with all power, authority, honour, and glory.

He is the three times HOLY God of the universe who dwells in unapproachable light. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. He is God. He is King. He is Holy. He is Righteous. He is Good. He is utterly untouched and untainted by sin. And this leads to the next step that we see in this Psalm.

² Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 138.

Having laid the foundation of God as the king and creator of all things we naturally move on to the next step that arises out of this understanding which is:

The Question

David begins by establishing God's role as the creator king, the sovereign ruler over all creation and that directly leads into the questions in verse 3.

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?” (Psalm 24:3 ESV)

These two questions are the natural and obvious questions that arise when we understand God properly. What do I mean by that?

You see, when we have a proper understanding of who God is; when we see him as the origin and the source of ALL THAT WE ARE and ALL THAT WE NEED; when we understand that he is our creator king, then we ought to be drawn to him, and we ought to realize that we cannot live up to his holy and perfect standard.

A proper understanding of God leads to a DESIRE FOR HIS PRESENCE and an AWARENESS OF OUR SIN.

It leads to the question “who on Earth can possibly ascend the hill? Who can possibly stand in his presence?”

If your understanding of God does not lead you to that place; if it is not leading you to DESIRE; to LONG for his presence, then something is missing! Look again! Look up! Consider what you might not be seeing. Consider what it is in your heart that is not delighting in who God is!

One of the purposes of this Psalm is to demonstrate the greatness, the wonder, and the glory of God. It is to elevate our hearts in longing and affection for our king of Glory. Because, when we

do see who God is; when we TRULY know his love, his goodness, his faithfulness, his tender fatherly love, his grace, and his mercy, his perfect justice and righteousness; when we see God as our heavenly father who created us, we ought to be filled, by God's grace, with a desire for his presence.

And that desire for his presence leads to a realization that we cannot enter God's presence on our own. It leads to a realization that:

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 ESV)

It leads to us proclaiming with Isaiah in Isaiah 6:

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5 ESV)

Or the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24 ESV)

The point is we cannot stand before the perfect, Holy, creator God of the universe in our sinful wretched state. Understanding who God is, and understanding who we are naturally leads to these questions: Who can ascend the hill? Who can stand in his Holy place?

These are the natural questions and, as we talked about in the Sermon on the Mount, they are THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS THERE IS! There is no more important, no more weighty, no more significant question than this! Who can enter the Presence of God. This is THE QUESTION of the Bible! Ever since the beginning when, because of their sin, Adam and Eve were cast out of God's presence in the garden; ever since then we have been separated from God.

We have a desire for God's presence. We have a NEED for God's presence. But we cannot enter it on our own. Luckily, the Psalm doesn't end here. It moves on to the next step. It has laid the foundation, it asks the important question, and then it gives us:

The Answer

The answer to this most important question is found in verse 4. Who shall stand in God's holy presence?

“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.” (Psalm 24:4 ESV)

He who has clean hands and a pure heart. We touched on this verse when we looked the blessing to those who are pure in heart. What we saw is that this phrase, clean hands and a pure heart, refers to those who are undivided in love for God and are unstained by sin. The person who has clean hands and a pure heart loves God alone, is loyal to God alone, and obeys God alone.

He is the perfect law keeper, there is no transgression in him, not only externally but also internally, there is no evil thought or desire. He is not deceitful. He doesn't merely have an appearance of righteousness and purity; he is not a hypocrite or an actor. No, he is pure, clean, and righteous through and through. VanGemeran sums this up well.

“God is King by virtue of having created all things (vv. 1–2), but he desires to rule over the people who open themselves to him by living clean, pure lives in his presence.”³

The problem is, of course, none of us are like that. Psalm 53 reminds us pointedly that:

“They have all fallen away;
 together they have become corrupt;
 there is none who does good,
 not even one.” (Psalm 53:3 ESV)

³ Willem A. VanGemeran, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 257.

There is none who does good, not even one. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that our righteousness is as filthy rags. We do not and cannot have clean hands and a pure heart through our own effort and ability.

So, the Psalm provides an answer but, clearly, the answer IS NOT US!

It's not me. It's not you. None of us have perfectly clean hands or a perfectly pure heart. We have all sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God, each and every one of us. It isn't us. It wasn't David he was a man after God's own heart but he definitely did not have clean hands. He was an adulterer and a murderer. Neither was it Solomon in all of his splendor, riches, and wisdom. Both David and Solomon are like arrows shot towards the sun. They point the way but they both fall short.

So, if it's not David, if it's not Solomon, if it's not the greatest kings Israel had to offer and if it is CERTAINLY not us. Who is it?

Who is the one with clean hands and a pure heart? Who is the one who will ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place? Who is the King of Glory?

The answer is Jesus. It is the God man, who took on human likeness, who was born of a virgin Mary, who lived a sinless life. It is he who can enter God's presence.

I just want to pause here for a moment. Sometimes we focus so much on the Jesus' death and resurrection that we downplay the importance of Jesus' life on Earth. Listen, the gospel is more than Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection from the dead. Now, it is certainly NOT LESS than that. Those things are ESSENTIAL, but so is his life. It's his sinlessness, it's his perfect righteousness, that allowed him to take our place upon the cross.

We call this the great exchange. Jesus dies on the cross and takes all the sins of his people upon himself and, in turn, we are given his perfect righteousness to cover over us. This is the most lopsided transaction in human history. It is the greatest act of charity possible, and it is only possible because of Jesus' perfect life, because of his clean hands and his pure heart.

So, the answer to the question of who can enter God's presence is: Jesus and, by extension, Christians, those who are united to Jesus through faith in him and repentance from their sins. Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection the door has been opened, the way has been made, the path has been cleared for us to come and receive the greatest, deepest, most fundamental desire of our hearts.

Through Jesus we have been welcomed home, and we are blessed as we see in verses 5 and 6:

“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” (Psalm 24:5-6 ESV)

The word generation there in verse 6 really means circle or group. These two verses are simply reminding us that all those who seek God's face, those who long for the presence of God, those who have a pure heart and clean hands, which is now available to us through faith in Jesus by God's grace, those people will be blessed. What we are seeing here is what we saw throughout all the beatitudes. The path to life, to blessing, to salvation, is received as a gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

But what a blessing it is! Again, I think we often downplay the blessing that is given to us in Christ. I love the way Plumer highlights this blessing so beautifully.

“The good man *shall receive the blessing, i. e.,* every good and perfect gift, temporal and spiritual, pleasing and disciplinary—*the blessing* which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow, including grace and glory, all of earth that is worth having, and all of heaven that his capacities can embrace.”⁴

I love that! All of earth worth having, all of heaven that our capacities can embrace. THAT is what we get in Jesus! Grace and Glory! Praise be to God!

⁴ William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), 323.

This Psalm is painting for us a BEAUTIFUL picture of the GOODNESS and the GLORY of the GOSPEL! We are seeing a GREAT GOD who created all things, and who loved us so much that WHILE WERE STILL SINNERS, WHILE WE HATED HIM, he sent his son to die in our place; to die the death WE DESERVED.

So that, through faith in him, that's it FAITH, there is no checklist of righteous deeds we must perform. There are no pilgrimages we have to undertake. There is no secret rule that we have to follow. There is no burden of DUTY or Law we must obey to get in. Through Faith in him and FAITH ALONE we are saved. Through the GIFT of God's MERCY, we can receive SALVATION and BLESSING, we receive Grace and Glory!

Through faith in Jesus, we are set on the narrow way. We are set on a journey further up and further in. It's not always easy, Jesus tells us to take up his cross and follow him, the path has its ups and downs, it has trials and hurdles, but it is a GLORIOUS PATH. Just like our creator king, it isn't SAFE, but it is GOOD.

It is soul satisfying. It is life-giving. It is the GLORIOUS path that Jesus walked before us, and it is the one he walks WITH US.

I hope you are seeing, and I hope you are feeling the progression of this Psalm. We have begun with the foundation of the authority and sovereign rule of God, we've seen the question that arise out of that and, like a crescendo building and rising we have seen the triumphant answer to that all important question in Jesus Christ.

The Psalms are songs and just like our worship songs often build before a resounding bridge or chorus, this Psalm is building here as we approach the next and final step in the progression. The drums are beginning to build. The bass is getting louder. The anticipation is rising as we see the final step:

The Response

This Psalm builds through the question and answer to the JOYOUS proclamation in the final 4 verses. Remember the glorious realities of the Gospel and the saving work of Jesus as we read the final 4 verses.

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!" (Psalm 24:7-10 ESV)

The Lord of hosts! He is the King of Glory! There is resounding and triumphant praise! The Lord has won the day! He is strong and mighty in battle! He is full of glory and splendour!

It is no wonder that many scholars attach this Psalm to a triumphant return to Jerusalem. There is a consistent theme of opening the gates and clearing the way, there is a consistent theme of looking upward to mount Zion, to the hill of the Lord from verse 3. This Psalm is inviting ALL PEOPLE, AT ALL TIMES, to lift up their heads to make way for the king of GLORY in their lives.

Lift up your heads, O Gates! O People, Look up! Behold the King of Glory.

Like the Israelites lifting their heads to bronze serpent, like the people looking up to the temple as they come to worship, like the disciples of Jesus looking upwards as he hung on the cross, like the apostles looking up as Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, we are being invited to LOOK UP; to Lift up our heads; to fix our eyes; to BEHOLD JESUS, to behold the king of Glory who has come to earth, to see Emmanuel, God with us.

VanGemeren summarizes it well:

“The Creator-God is the King of Glory and has come down to dwell in the midst of the city of human beings.”⁵

Do you see that? Do you see the GLORY of that reality. God CONDESCENDED to come down to us. Jesus is GOD, and he took on HUMANITY in addition to his divinity in order to be with us. To walk among us, to suffer with us, to eat with us, to weep with us, as Hebrews says:

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:14-16 ESV)

That is Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the gentle Jesus meek and mild, who knows us, who sympathizes with us, who loves us, AND HE IS THE LION OF JUDAH, He is the KING OF GLORY. HE STRONG AND MIGHTY! HE IS MIGHTY IN BATTLE!

HE fought the war on sin and death, and HE WON! He conquered death! He rose from the dead! He made a way for us to RISE WITH HIM! He is the KING OF GLORY!

WORSHIP HIM!

This Psalm is a triumphant RESOUNDING INVITATION TO WORSHIP! See the king! Lift up your heads to behold his GLORY and MAJESTY, lift up your hearts and your voices in WORSHIP! He is the CREATOR GOD, the SUFFERING SERVANT, the WARRIOR KING! He is all these things! HE is the one who comes down from heaven and enters our mess. He knows what is to be tempted and to suffer, yet he remained sinless. He has clean hands and a pure heart. He ascended the hill. He stands in the Holy place of God, and he brings us with him by grace through faith in him!

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 262.

So, worship him!

And not just in song. So often we conflate worship with singing. We think it is something we do at Church on a Sunday. Yet worship is unceasing. Our worship never ends, it only changes direction. Either we are worshipping God, or we are worshipping something else. We are always worshipping. We worship in all that we do.

We are being called to worship God in all that we do. In the way we parent, in the way we work, in the way we interact with one another, in the way we spend our free time, in the way we act when we are stuck in traffic. We are called to worship God in all that we do; to live in such a way that demonstrates the surpassing worth of God to us.

Yet maybe you are here this morning, and this isn't true for you. Maybe you are here, and you are listening to me talk about the resounding building climactic response of worship and adoration in this psalm and you're not feeling it. You don't feel the excitement that you once did. You feel apathy. You feel tired and worn in your faith. When you think about God, you are not drawn to desire him, you don't feel inclined to worship him.

Or you are here, and you have never thought about God that way. You have never considered worshipping him or living for him. You may have never desired to be with him or realized your need for Jesus to reconcile you with God.

No matter where you are coming from this morning the encouragement of this Psalm is the same. Look up! Look again! And again! And Again! Behold our God!

Psalm 24 comes along beside us and grabs our head and turns it. It reorients our perspective. It gives us clarity and focus. It reminds us of the surpassing GREATNESS, WONDER, and GLORY of God. And we need that! Wherever you are at in life, wherever you are in your journey, if you are just at the beginning, if you are nearing the end, if you are on the mountaintop, if you are in the valley, if you haven't even begun your walk with God, this Psalm is for YOU.

It is a reminder that all of us need. It is beautiful display of the Glory of our king. It shows that God is the creator. He is the author of all creation, and he is sovereign over it all and, despite the fact that we choose to reject him over and over again in our sin, he sent his Son to make a way for us to be with him. Jesus came and died in our place, to conquer sin and death, to win the war and bring us home to God. He has opened the door, he has torn the temple curtain in two, he has made a way. He is the king of Glory. He is worthy of all our praise, all of our worship, He is worthy of all that we are and all that we have to give.

So, lift up your heads. Behold your King. Come bow down before him. Worship him, now and forevermore.

Let's pray together.