

## Reflections on Psalm 24

### Introduction

Psalm 24 is the third in a triad of Psalms, along with Psalm 22 and 23, which speaks with special directness of the Lord Jesus: Psalm 22—the cross; Psalm 23—the (shepherd’s) crook; and Psalm 24—the crown. However, Psalm 24 is not a psalm sung *by* Jesus during His suffering and humanity (like Psalms 22 and 23), but ultimately a song *about* Jesus that we sing to Him.

Psalm 24 is a “Royal Psalm”—a category of Psalms that we have not yet seen in our study. Royal psalms speak of God as King. This theme includes Yahweh as king over creation, for He is its creator; Yahweh as king over Israel, for He is her savior; and Yahweh as the king who is coming, for He is the judge of heaven and earth. Often in these psalms the rule of God is presented against the backdrop of pagan Canaanite thought and religion. These psalms not only exalt God as the unmatched King, but also serve to subtly debunk the religions of Israel’s surrounding culture.

The superscription tells us that this is another psalm of David. While we are not given the exact setting in which David penned these words, the content of the psalm suggests a very likely scenario—the bringing of the ark into Jerusalem. Recall the story: (*see if kids or others can relate parts of the story*) The unthinkable had happened; the ark was lost to the Philistines in a battle (1 Samuel 4:1-11), but they didn’t want it (remember why?) and sent it back on cart to Israel. Some of the men of that city in Israel decided to look inside the ark and seventy of them lost their lives. For one curious look, God struck them all dead! The people responded, “Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” (1 Samuel 6:20). The ark was then effectively put in storage at the home of Abinadab for 70 years! Once David had secured his reign and Jerusalem as his capital, his top priority was to bring the ark to Jerusalem as the central place of Israel’s worship. David took thirty-thousand men with him, put the ark on a cart, and celebrated as they began the journey to Jerusalem. The oxen stumbled, the ark tottered, and a godly man stretched out his hand to steady it, and God struck him dead! (2 Samuel 6:6-7). As a result David was afraid of Yahweh and said, “How can the ark of God come to me?” (2 Samuel 6:9). Three months later David attempted it again, this time following the instructions of the Law precisely (no more cart!). He worshipped with all His might before the Lord on the way, offering sacrifices every six paces, until the ark was brought safely into the tent in Jerusalem. The ark was not a magic box, but it was the potent symbol of the residing presence of Yahweh.

While we cannot be certain whether this episode was the exact occasion of David writing this psalm, the lingering question that this event elicits (asked by Israel and David) is echoed in this

Psalm: “Who may ascend into the hill of the Yahweh? And who can stand in His holy place?” (v.3). In this psalm David is asking the central question of how one might rightly approach an indescribably holy God.

### **Read Psalm 24:1-10**

This royal psalm celebrating Yahweh as king comes in three movements. At first, these movements seem somewhat disconnected, but come together beautifully in view of the fulfillment in Christ.

#### **1. An affirmation of Yahweh as the creator and sovereign of the world (v. 1-2)**

*“To Yahweh does the earth belong and all that fills it; the inhabited land and all who dwell in it”* (literal translation). The earth and what fills it belongs to Yahweh and no one else. Both the “stuff” in the earth and the people in the world are Yahweh’s. He is no tribal deity of Israel; His rule extends to all peoples, even if they do not acknowledge Him. As the the owner of all things and everyone, He is the sovereign ruler of all. He will do as He pleases. The reason it all belongs to Him, according to the psalmist, is because He created it (v. 2). Drawing on the language of Genesis 1, where God called the dry land to rise from the watery abyss (Gen. 1:9); here God is said to have laid the earth’s foundations over the seas and established it over the rivers. This wording, which may seem peculiar to us, is built upon a common image in the ancient world. A recurring poetic idea concerning the power of God is to say that He is stronger than the mighty seas and He establishes limits for them. This concept presents the biblical response to the paganism of that day which presumed there was a conflict between various gods (including the sea and sea monster), leading to the ordering of the universe. The supposed water forces of evil are a constant threat. To say that God has firmly established the earth over the seas is a highly poetic way to emphasize the reality of Yahweh’s sovereignty as the Creator: He is in control. All the earth belongs to Him because He made it!

#### *Questions for Reflection:*

- How does believing that God is the creator and owner of all things shape your view of God? Of people, including unbelievers? Of the earth, including disasters and pandemics? Of the things you possess?
- Read **Acts 17:22-29** and observe how Paul used the truth of God as the creator of the world and humankind to address those in false religions or worldviews. How did Paul apply the truth of God as creator? What conclusions did he draw?

#### **2. An inquiry concerning fitness for approach to Yahweh’s presence (v. 3-6)**

Knowing that Yahweh is the creator and sovereign of everyone and everything, who then can approach Him? Here is a marvel—David assumes that one can actually approach the God of

verses 1-2! But who? In many ways this is the central question of all theology. How may one approach, be in the presence of, have relationship with the Holy One? The incident with the ark, that potent symbol of God's presence, clearly taught that God is not to be trifled with; we do not casually approach Him on our own terms. And yet, He desires to dwell with His people; the other great truth the ark represented. David's answer to this all-important question is given in the terms of the provisions under the Old Covenant. Ascending the "hill of Yahweh" and standing in "His holy place" were images of tabernacle/temple worship. By means of the sacrificial system and priesthood, God had made a way for sinful people to approach Him. However, outward ritual and sacrifice were never sufficient in themselves; the lifestyle and attitude of the worshipper was all-important. Almost nothing was as wretched to God as outward forms of worship that were hypocritical.

"Hands" refer to one's deeds and actions; to have clean or innocent hands points to a pattern of life free from charges of wrong or inconsistency. "Heart" refers to one's attitude or disposition. One's holiness must be all-around, both inward and outward. "Lifting up one's soul" is a way of speaking of full-fledged commitment. There can be no divided affections; one's devotion must be to Yahweh alone. In addition, one's speech must be marked with integrity. He doesn't swear false oaths or lie in order to gain advantage of people. It is this person, when approaching God on His terms and in this manner, who may be assured of receiving blessing and salvation (righteousness) from God, not judgment. One's deeds and dispositions and affections and words are all in view of the one who may approach the Holy One. David is describing a relative righteousness, not perfection, of the worshipper, which is essential in the true worship of and relationship to the living God. And yet, at some level, it still raises the question "who can approach this holy God?"

*Questions for Reflection:*

- Why do we not marvel more at the truth that God can actually be approached? Are we ever guilty of being somewhat flippant in our approach to God?
- Why isn't Psalm 24 teaching that merely "good people" regardless of their faith are accepted by God and truly worship Him?
- How are the stipulations of Psalm 24 related to the essence of New Covenant worship described in **Romans 12:1-2**? How does this psalm impact our outward forms of worship under the New Covenant (going to church, singing, praying, reading Scripture, giving, meeting needs)?

### **3. An anticipation of the King of glory entering the holy city (v. 7-10)**

The final scene of the psalm is the dramatic entrance of the King of glory into the city of Jerusalem. As we have seen, the ark was a potent symbol of Yahweh's presence, and when it arrived it was as if He arrived. Approaching the Holy One is only possible because He has

desired to dwell with His people in the holy city. Although His presence, as David had learned, is dangerous, when approached on His terms and in His way, it is glorious! It is the pinnacle of David's desires. He calls to the gates of Jerusalem to rouse themselves and stand as the King of glory enters. In antiphonal language (question and answer), the psalm evokes a litany of praise to this King, and then repeats it for effect and emphasis. The King is clearly identified: "Yahweh strong and mighty, Yahweh mighty in battle, Yahweh of armies ("hosts"). He is the King who has come victorious from battle to reside with His people.

This dramatic language finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus. He enters Jerusalem the first time as the truly "righteous One" who can stand in the presence of God for us. Our righteousness is relative, but His is perfect, by which He became our Savior. He went to battle for us and has defeated God's enemies, even death itself. One day the resurrected, glorified, victorious Lord Jesus will enter the gates of the New Jerusalem as a great warrior. He is the King of Glory!

*Questions for Reflection:*

- How does Jesus fulfill the requirements of Psalm 24 of the one who may approach the Lord? How does this relate to our approach of God? (see Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22) In what other ways does Jesus fulfill the Old Covenant forms of worshiping Yahweh?
- Do you think of Jesus as the coming King and warrior? **Read Revelation 19:11-16:** How does this help shape your understanding of Jesus and your worship of Him?

Pastor Mark