



Psalm 24 - Entrance into the Temple

Of David. A Psalm.

Introduction

This psalm seems fitted for some liturgical occasion, perhaps one that celebrates the way that David brought the ark of the Lord into Jerusalem (2 Samuel Chapter 6); this would explain the interest in God's presence in Psalm vv.3-6, and the address to the gates in vv.7-10. The psalm asserts the astounding idea that the God who created and owns everything is the very same God into whose presence the faithful worshipper enters because of the covenant with Israel. Such is the privilege of being Israel, and such too defines their mission, namely, to bring God's fame to all his creation, and especially to all mankind.

Psalm 24:1-2 - The Lord Is Creator and Owner of All

The Lord, the covenant God of Israel, is the one who founded the world, as confirmed by Genesis 1:1-2:3, where he is called God, the transcendent Creator. The focus here is on the earth as the dry land, where human beings dwell, as distinguished from the waters; refer to Genesis 1:9-10. Paul quotes v.1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26 to explain that since God owns everything, foods are included, and thus may be enjoyed without qualms.

- ¹ The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;

Psalm 24:1

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. David was a noble, successful king, but of a relatively small and insignificant kingdom. One might easily think that the gods of the Egyptians or Assyrians were greater because those kingdoms were greater. Yet David rightly knew that the Lord, Yahweh the covenant God of Israel, was God of all the earth. It was not enough for David to say that the entire earth

belonged to the Lord; he added that all its fullness also belonged to him: <<**Who can confront it and be safe? – under the whole heaven, who?>>** (Job 41:11). It is difficult to think of a more sweeping statement of God's ownership.

There is a sense in which the world belongs to Satan. Satan is called both the prince and the god of this world: <<**I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way>>** (John 14:30-31), and: <<**In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God>>** (2 Corinthians 4:4), and when he tempted Jesus with the promise of giving him the kingdoms of this world, Jesus did not question the devil's ability to do so. Yet Satan can only do anything if God allows it, so God's ultimate ownership is true. Paul quoted this line twice (1 Corinthians 10:26 and 10:28) to establish the principle that no food is in itself unclean, and that there is in fact nothing that actually belongs to the false gods the pagans made offerings to.

The world, and those who live in it. God's ownership of the earth extends to the people who live upon it. Through the rights of creation and continuing provision, God has a claim upon every person who has ever lived, those currently and those generations yet to come.

² for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

Psalm 24:2

For he has founded it on the seas. God has right to the earth and all who dwell upon it because he created both it and them. Specifically, David looks back to the creation account of Genesis Chapter 1 and remembers the creation of land in the midst of earth's waters on the third day of creation.

And established it on the rivers. It is believed that David had never ventured more than a few hundred miles beyond Israel, and had never seen a sea other than the Mediterranean and perhaps also the Red Sea. David never saw a modern globe or earth projection. Yet he knew that the waters of the earth dominated the globe, so much so that it could be said that the earth is in the midst of the waters instead of the waters in the midst of the earth's land. To David, this may have seemed to be a wonderful engineering marvel, that God could establish the earth upon the waters: <<**They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water>>** (2 Peter 3:5).

Psalm 24:3-6 - Who Receives Blessing from Him?

This section reminds the worshippers of a recurring theme in the OT: although every Israelite may attend worship at the sanctuary, i.e. the hill of the Lord, his holy place, not everyone will really receive blessing or will genuinely enjoy the status of righteousness (v.5). God expects his people to embrace their privileges from their hearts, and to show that in their behaviour (v.4 and v.6). This theme appears elsewhere in the Psalms, e.g. Psalm 15:1-5 and 51:16-19, as well as in Proverbs, e.g. Proverbs 15:8, and the Prophets, e.g. Isaiah 1:11-17.

- ³ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?

Psalm 24:3

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? In light of God's sovereign ownership of the earth and all who live upon it, David wondered exactly who had the right to stand before God. This was not about mountain climbing or hill ascending ability, but about the right to come before God in faith: <<***Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'***>> (Galatians 3:11).

And who shall stand in his holy place? David here clarified his previous question. David asked, 'Who has the right to stand before God at his holy temple, in the holy place?' This is a question that used to concern mankind much more than it does in our present day. There was a time when men and women genuinely wondered what was required to make them right with God. Today, it seems the most asked question is something like, 'How can I be happy?' Personal happiness is important; but it is not more important than being in right relationship with the Creator and Provider. David not only asked an important question, he asked the most *important* question.

- ⁴ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

Psalm 24:4

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts. This speaks of a man or woman who is pure in both their actions, i.e. hands, and intentions (hearts). This is the one who can ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place. David already established that God ruled the earth; now he declared that God rules the earth on a moral foundation. He is concerned with the moral behaviour of mankind. Clean

hands are important for good hygiene, but this speaks of much more than washing with water. Pontus Pilate washed his hands, but they were not clean.

The Hebrew for clean can also be translated 'innocent'; clean hands are those that have acted innocently toward others: <<*Did he not himself say to me, "She is my sister"? And she herself said, "He is my brother." I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands*>> (Genesis 20:5), <<*I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord*>> (Psalm 26:6), and: <<*All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence*>> (Psalm 73:13). Likewise the pure heart is the one cleansed of all unworthy motives toward other people. In the LXX, the Greek for 'pure heart' lies behind the sixth beatitude: <<*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*>> (Matthew 5:8). Thus true piety is shown both in hunger for God (v.6), and in fair and generous dealing with one another (v.4).

Who do not lift up their souls to what is false. What is false refers specifically to idol worship. The one accepted by God also rejects idolatry in his actions but especially in his soul.

And do not swear deceitfully. Spoken words are a good indication of the state of the heart, the inner man or woman: <<*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*>> (Matthew 12:34). One who makes deceptive promises finds no welcome from God. David understood all this under the general principles of the old covenant, where God promised to bless and receive obedient Israel, and also promised to curse and afflict a disobedient Israel; refer to Deuteronomy Chapters 27-28.

Outside the terms of the old covenant that God made with Israel, these answers of David may cause one to despair. It is easy to look at this list and see that the hands are not always clean; the heart is not always pure. Idolatry can be both subtle and stubborn in the heart. One may find it too easy to make promises with at least a tinge of deceit. Fortunately, God established a better covenant, a new covenant through the person and work of Jesus. Under the new covenant one sees that Jesus is the one who has clean hands and a pure heart, perfectly so. Jesus has never lifted up his soul to an idol, and has never sworn deceitfully. Paul shows in Romans 3:22 that, due to Jesus' righteousness, which is given to all who believe, one can ascend his holy hill and stand in his holy place.

Nevertheless, David's principle is also accurate under the new covenant in this sense: the conduct of one's life is a reflection of their fellowship with God. As John wrote: <<*If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true*>> (1 John 1:6). One might say that, under the old covenant, a righteous walk was the precondition

for fellowship with God; under the new covenant a righteous walk is the result of fellowship with God, founded on faith. Yet under both covenants, God cares very much about the moral conduct of mankind, especially those who identify themselves as his people.

- ⁵ They will receive blessing from the Lord,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
- ⁶ Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

Psalm 24:5-6

They will receive blessing from the Lord. God knows and cares about the moral behaviour of men and women. He rewards those who honour him with their lives. This blessing may be understood sometimes in reward that God grants to the obedient; other times it may be understood as the natural result of living according to God's wise order. It is a choice laid out before everyone, just as it was stated to the Israelites: <<*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse*>> (Deuteronomy 11:26).

And vindication from the God of their salvation. David here speaks in the idiom of the old covenant, where right standing with God might be assumed from the life of the obedient. At the same time, David wrote of a received righteousness that came from the God of his salvation. Even with the important distinctions between the old and new covenants, it is a mistake to say that salvation was by works under the old covenant. One might say that in some sense blessing was by works of obedience, but righteousness was always and is always from the God of his salvation, it comes by grace alone. Under the old covenant, that faith was often expressed by the trust in the work of sacrifice, looking forward to the ultimate, perfect sacrifice promised by God and fulfilled in the work of Jesus at the Cross.

Such is the company of those who seek him. The blessed and righteous ones do more than enter into covenant with God; they also pursue him with a continual seeking: <<*Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually*>> (Psalm 105:4). This is something each generation must do afresh, especially those who have strayed: <<*I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favour*>> (Hosea 5:15).

Who seek the face of the God of Jacob. The idea is intensified by repetition, by description (to seek his face is even closer than seeking him), and by the use of a contemplative pause: Selah.

Psalm 24:7-10 - Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!

Readers may imagine this as the call and response before the gates of Jerusalem: in v.7 the procession bearing the ark announces God's presence in the ark, seeking entry into his sanctuary; 'Who is this King of glory?' (v.8a) is the reply, asking for further identification. The procession then says who the Lord is, 'The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!' and then repeats the request for entry (v.9). Again the doorkeepers reply, asking for identification (v.10a), and again the procession identifies the Lord (v.10b).

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 the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.

Psalm 24:7-8

Lift up your heads, O gates! The first section of this Psalm declared the greatness of God. The second section spoke of how man can come into relationship with this great God. Now the third section welcomes God to his people by the opening of the gates.

That the King of glory may come in. Assuming that King David wrote this Psalm either for the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem or in commemoration of it, it can also be seen that the singer saw in that ceremony the symbol of greater things, such as the arrival of the Messiah: <<**Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey**>> (Zechariah 9:9).

Several connections to this idea that the King of glory shall come in can be made:

- This was fulfilled with the Ark of the Covenant came into Jerusalem, as recounted in 2 Samuel 6:11-18.
- This was fulfilled when the ascended Jesus entered into heaven: <<**As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him**>> (Daniel 7:13), <<**When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven,**

suddenly two men in white robes stood by them>> (Acts 1:9-10), and: <<God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places>> (Ephesians 1:20).

- This is fulfilled when an individual heart opens to Jesus as King.

The idea is plain; it is assumed that when God is welcomed with open gates and doors, he is pleased to come in. The King of glory will meet with man when approached correctly and the doors are opened to him. The idea that the doors or gates might be opened to God yet he would not come to man is not even considered. When one draws near to him, he draws near to them as confirmed in James 4:8. In Revelation 3:20 this idea is presented as a plea from Jesus to his people: *<<Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me>>.* Jesus promised, 'open the door, and I will come in'.

Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Perhaps with a touch of amazement, David notes that the same God who responds to man's welcome is still the King of glory; he is mighty in battle. His openness to man does not diminish his glory or might: *<<Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all>> (1 Chronicles 29:11).*

⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted 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

Psalm 24:9-10

Lift up your heads, O gates! As is common in Hebrew poetry, repetition communicates emphasis. The ideas of vv.7-8 were important and glorious enough to repeat.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem at the Triumphal Entry, Matthew states that the whole city asked *<<Who is this?>> (Matthew 21:10b)*. If they had known who it was, the response should have been: The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. This Psalm rightly ends on a reflective pause, Selah. It is no small thing that this King of glory stoops down to receive man and even to be received by men.