

The King of Glory

Psalm 24

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There's an old adage that says that you should never meet your heroes. The idea is that inevitably, your heroes cannot live up to the image you've created of them in your mind. They are still human, and they will likely disappoint you. That was something we always found interesting about hosting concerts. Sometimes we discovered wonderful, humble, and intelligent Christian artists. Other times we discovered people who were very self-centered.

That experience is true of every person. We all have flaws, and the more you get to know someone, the more evident those flaws become. This is one of the things that makes marriage so difficult. When you are dating, you tend to focus on all the wonderful traits your spouse has. After a while, you also become painfully aware of their weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. This is why we tend to keep people at arm's length—we know they won't like what they see when they get really close.

The Lord, however, is not like that. The Lord is perfect, and the closer we get to Him, the more we see how perfect, wise, and powerful He really is. David understood this and desired to know God in all His fullness, because the more he understood His character, the more he was driven to worship. That should be our goal as well. Psalm 24 is a short psalm, but it intends for us to lift our eyes, reflecting on the character of God, so that we may worship Him as He deserves.

God the Creator

David begins by reflecting on the greatness of God as the Creator of all things.

¹ The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. ² For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths. (Psalm 24:1-2, NLT)

David says that everything and everyone on the earth belongs to God. He says that because God created all things, all things are subject to Him. This is pretty straightforward reasoning, but it has been called into question by our society in the last century.

Over the last hundred years or so, there has been a steady increase in what we might call naturalism in our world—particularly within the scientific and academic communities. This belief system has slowly begun to spread to the people at large in our day as well. The central tenet of this belief system is that there is no Creator, but that the world as we know it has come about by purely natural causes.

The reason this belief is so popular today is for exactly the reasons David mentions. If the Lord created all things, then all things are subject to Him. But that flies against our sinful tendencies. From the very beginning, mankind has wanted to be in control. The

notion that we are not the one in charge is unpalatable to many, which has led us to come up with another explanation for how we came to be. Naturalism provides a way to explain the world while sidestepping the existence of God (and therefore the need to submit to Him).

But there's a problem with a naturalistic view. If our existence is merely a cosmic accident, there is no purpose or meaning to our existence. We are simply a collection of chemicals in a world of randomness. The resulting philosophy is called nihilism, which may be explained as "nothing-ism." It says that if we are simply random chemicals, not created by God, then life has no purpose or meaning—you live, you die, and that's it. Everything is merely the working out of physics and chemistry in our world, nothing more, nothing less. Understandably, this leads to a pretty hopeless existence.

David's point in highlighting God as the Creator is quite the opposite. David said that God created the world, and He did so on purpose. Your existence today is not an accident of chemistry and physics, but the intentional choice of an all-powerful God! You and I were created on purpose and for a purpose! It is a very different perspective than the pure naturalism rampant in our world today.

David still points to our need to submit to God, but his point is that this is not an obligation but a privilege. We have the blessing of having the guidance of the Creator of the universe to show us how we should live! We have the owner's manual for life, written by the One who created us, designed us, and loves us.

But why follow God's instructions? Why not simply choose to go our own way, utilizing the brains He has given us to determine our best course? These opening verses answer those questions as well. David says that God "laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths".

Throughout scripture, we see the greatness of God's wisdom and character displayed for us in the wonder of creation. The biblical writers talk of the foundations of the world, how it is suspended in space, the depth of the oceans, and the unpredictability of the weather as evidence of how God's ways are higher than ours.

It is easy to scoff at these ancient writers as simpletons who didn't have the knowledge we do today, but while we have a greater understanding of our world and how it works, in many ways we are still just as clueless as ever! We have barely begun to explore the ocean depths, and as we do, we discover mysteries we do not yet understand. As we look into the depths of the universe, we see things that puzzle us and raise questions we have not yet been able to answer. We now know the world is made up of atoms, but as we dig deeper into what makes them and how they work, we find ourselves even more confused than ever. And though we have weather satellites, doppler radar, and supercomputers studying the weather, we all understand that the notion of a "10-day forecast" is a joke! The weather is still just as much a mystery as ever.

David's point still stands—the One who created all these things, the One who designed them and who holds them together, is the same One who tells us how to live. A proper study of our world should not lead to nihilism, but to trust in the Creator! When we see the power and wisdom of His creation and recognize how little we understand, it should drive us to a place of trust and submission. We do not obey the Lord out of mere obligation, but we should obey because we recognize that His ways are far higher than ours, and only a fool would choose to trust their own judgment over His.

Who May Ascend?

After establishing the greatness of God as seen in the creation of the world around us, David asks an important question—who is worthy to be in His presence?

³ Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴ Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. ⁵ They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God their savior. ⁶ Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob. (Psalm 24:3-6, NLT)

David understood something very important about God—He is perfect and holy. He cannot allow sin to persist. His very nature consumes and destroys sin. So sinful people cannot enter His presence, because they will be consumed by His holiness and righteousness.

David lays out the requirements to enter God's presence. He says, "Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies." We should look carefully at these requirements, because they are a pretty tall order.

David says we must have pure hands and hearts. This does not mean that we must properly wash our hands after going to the bathroom, or that we must ensure that we don't consume too many saturated fats (though I would recommend both). David is speaking metaphorically. So what does the metaphor of clean hands mean? It means doing things that are right and avoiding things that are wrong. This is not limited only to the actions we take, but also the things we say, because David says that we must not tell lies. We should be people who never violate God's law in the things we do.

Right away, we can see we're in trouble based on this standard, because we have all done things we know we shouldn't. But that's not the worst part of David's statement. He also says we must have pure hearts. This means that we must not only be pure in the things we do, but even in the things we think and feel!

This was the same principle Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He took the things people thought they were doing well and asked them to look deeper. Jesus explained that God is not merely concerned with the outward appearances, but with what is in our hearts. God desires us not only to do what is right, but to think like He does, to have hearts like His. I don't know about you, but I fail miserably at this. Even when I manage to hold my tongue or avoid evil actions, the thoughts that go through my

mind are often not the things God desires for me. I suspect most of us share this experience.

So, if we have all failed at this, and only those who are pure can enter God's presence, what hope do any of us have? Notice what verse 5 says—that we will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God *our savior*. Why would David describe the Lord as our savior in these verses? Because David understood the point that is central to the Bible and to all of life—we cannot measure up to God on our own; our only hope is to ask Him for help, to ask Him to do what we cannot!

David did not know the fullness of God's plan to send Jesus into the world and pay the penalty of our sin, but he did know that his only hope was for God to save him and all of humanity. This is the central message of this psalm—we are in desperate need of a Savior! Rather than assuming that we can be good enough or hoping that God will grade on a curve, we must throw ourselves upon His mercy, seeking His help to be made right. It is only by seeking Jesus as both our Savior and our Lord that we can be made right to enter the presence of God. But if we will do that, then we will be able to seek God and worship in His presence!

Open Up!

The final stanza of this psalm is perplexing.

⁷ Open up, ancient gates! Open up, ancient doors, and let the King of glory enter.

⁸ Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, invincible in battle. ⁹ Open up, ancient gates! Open up, ancient doors, and let the King of glory enter. ¹⁰ Who is the King of glory? The Lord of Heaven's Armies—he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:7-10, NLT)

This final section seems to be David, the worshiper, praying for the gates to open for the King of glory to enter. Why would David pray this? What could he possibly be referring to? After all, isn't the King of glory worthy and able to enter anywhere He pleases?

The answer, of course, is yes. God can enter any place He desires. No one and no thing can keep Him out. But David is looking into the future and speaking prophetically. David knew that the only hope of mankind was for a Savior to come and rescue us. I think he had that in mind as he wrote these words.

You probably remember that Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem for His final time on Palm Sunday. He was coming into the holy city to do the very thing David had prayed for. The King of glory would come into the city to die, so that we might be set free. David may have been speaking prophetically of this very event—the time when the ancient gates of Jerusalem would open for the King of glory to become our Savior.

It is fitting that Psalm 24 was traditionally recited by the priests on the first day of the week (Sunday). So, as the priests were singing, "Open up, ancient doors, and let the King of glory enter", Jesus was doing exactly that!

But I think David may have even had one other instance in mind. On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the city as the King riding on a donkey, but He will one day enter the Holy City not as a sacrificial lamb, but as a conquering hero! Listen to how Revelation 19 describes this future scene,

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war.

¹² His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him that no one understood except himself. ¹³ He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. ¹⁶ On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords. (Revelation 19:11-16, NLT)

This passage describes Jesus at the end of all things. He comes triumphant and victorious. I think David may have been alluding to this future day when Christ will rightfully take His throne and come in power. He was calling us to look forward to a future day when Christ will make all things new and make all things good. It is a hope every believer clings to as well.

Conclusion

Psalms 24 reflects the fullness of the character of God. The Lord is the mighty Creator, who made all things out of nothing. He is holy, demanding absolute perfection from everything that enters His presence. Grasping this truth reminds us that we do not measure up to His standards—not by a long shot. But this psalm also points us to the fact that God is our Savior. He has made a way for us to enter His presence, even though we do not deserve it. But it is also a reminder that the story isn't over yet. The world is still full of evil because God isn't finished. One day, Jesus will return in glory. The ancient doors and gates will open, but this time He will not come as a lamb to be slain but as a conquering hero. All who have trusted Him will experience everlasting life, and all who stand against Him will be destroyed.

With all that said, I want to draw some lessons we can take from this psalm that should continue to guide us. **First, God should not be taken lightly.** Many today claim to believe in a god, but it is not the God revealed to us in the Bible. They imagine Him as a kindly old grandfather, who invites us to sit on His lap and will happily indulge us in whatever we desire to do. They imagine that God will simply overlook our sin and tell us that everything is ok. But that isn't the God David (and the rest of scripture) reveals to us. God is indeed loving—He is our Savior! But He is not to be taken lightly.

You may be familiar with this concept from C.S. Lewis' work, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the first book, the children had heard all about Aslan (who represents God). They heard that Aslan was good and he was the only hope for all of Narnia. After all this talk about Aslan, one of the children was surprised to learn that Aslan was actually a lion. She asked, "Is he safe?" And she was told, "Of course not! He's a lion! He's not safe."

But He is good.” This is an apt description of our God. We should not imagine that He will turn a blind eye to sin. He will not. But He loves us. He desires what is best for us. He seeks to lead us, and we should follow. Ultimately, He also provides salvation and forgiveness for us. We must seek Him in all we do. We ignore Him or underestimate Him at our peril. Do not suppose that you can live in rebellion to God forever. He will not be mocked. See the fullness of His character, so that you may approach Him as He deserves.

Second, salvation is a result of God’s goodness not ours. The message of Christianity is that we cannot measure up to God’s standards, which is why we need a Savior. But there are still times when Christians fail and feel like God cannot possibly love us. There will be times when you are overcome by the seriousness of your sin. Maybe you think of things in your past and imagine that God must simply look at you in disgust. But the message of the Bible is that Jesus has made it possible for every person to be forgiven, no matter what is in their past (or their present or future!) Remember that our hope of forgiveness is not anchored to our performance, but to our faith in Christ. In the times when you feel that you don’t measure up, do not run from the Lord, fearful that He will reject you, run to Him, recognizing that He alone is your hope. He is our Savior. We are dependent upon His goodness, not on our own.

Finally, this should lead us to holy living. If we recognize the greatness, the power, and the grace of our God, it should naturally lead us to live in ways that please Him and honor Him. So, what is it that pleases our Lord? David gives us the answer. He wants us to have pure hands and hearts. He wants us to worship Him alone. He wants us to be truthful in all we do. If we recognize what Christ has done for us and see the greatness of the God who created us, sustains us, and loves us, then we should strive to live in this way. We should strive to live in ways that align with His word. The Lord is not interested in mere lip service. He’s not even impressed with us keeping a list of rules. What He desires is our hearts to be fully consumed with His goodness. We must do battle with sin at its core—in our hearts, our attitudes, and in our minds. So spend time working on the internal things. Do battle with the sinful thoughts and attitudes that drive much of what we do. Pray not only that the Lord would help us to act better, but to help us think better. If we strive to have pure hearts, pure hands will follow. If we want to please the King of glory, we must seek to honor Him inside and out.

David understood that the more fully we see God’s character, the more deeply we will worship Him and more completely we will follow Him. This psalm is intended to bring us to the greatest wonder in the universe—the King of glory. I hope today you will take some time to reflect on the fullness of His character, to wonder at the created world, recognizing that is not a cosmic accident, but the intentional act of a loving God. See Him as the One who created all things, sustains all things, and is utterly holy. And remember that He sees our sin and offers a way of forgiveness. Rather than leaving us helpless, He provides a means for us to come to Him in faith. If that doesn’t drive you to worship Him, I don’t know what will.

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