

Joining in the Celebration of Our King

Shaped by the Psalms / Psalm 24 / June 28, 2026

Introduction:

This morning, we are continuing our summer series in the Psalms that considers how various types of psalms shape our responses to God. Last week, we looked at Psalm 32, as a wisdom psalm, to see how it teaches us the value of confessing our sins and running to Jesus for instruction. This week, we'll turn our attention to Psalm 24, as a Royal, or Kingship Psalm. Royal psalms are spread throughout the Psalter, reflecting the relationship between the Lord and the Davidic kings. Other Royal psalms are Psalm 2, 21, 72, and 132. They speak to how the kings from David's line serve as instruments of the Lord's sovereign rule over His people. More importantly, they point forward to the Messianic King to come from David's line who would fulfill God's covenant promises. As we live on the other side of that fulfillment, we find greater reasons for these psalms to embolden our worship and firmly establish our hope and expectations. While all psalms should be read and understood through gospel eyes, it is particularly important for these types of psalms. And my hope this morning is to help us see how beautiful Psalm 24 is when seen through the lens of the gospel. There are several reasons to believe this psalm commemorates the moment David brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. Serving as a song of procession, it welcomes the King and his warriors back from battle, celebrating their victory in returning the ark of God's presence to the city. Key to how it shapes our response today is understanding its movement through three progressing blocks of verses, called strophes, that build to a climax. Rather than considering how the psalm might shape our response at the end, I want to consider how each strophe shapes our response to God as we move through them. The first strophe, in verses 1-2, calls for us to,

Know that Everything Belongs to The Lord

The psalms often refer to God's rule over all things, but Psalm 24 begins with a slightly different emphasis. Look at verses 1-2, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." In Hebrew, the first words are "The Lord's," placing them in the emphatic position. A clunkier translation might be, "The Lord's is the earth." Going beyond a simple understand of God's rule over everything, this asserts God's dominion comes from His ownership. The language in verse 1 ensures nothing falls outside of His ownership as the term's "fullness" and "the world" emphasis everything, and "those who dwell therein," everyone. Church, it is not simply that God stands as ruler over all things, He is the owner of everything. Note the reason in verse 2. Seas and rivers speak to unstable chaos in the Ancient Near Eastern mind. God owns all things because He provides stability even to that which is thought of to be formless and chaotic. James Luther Mays draws the appropriate conclusion at this point, saying, "What the confession excludes in the modern world must be made clear by the congregation who profess it. It excludes any scientism that takes the world to be merely the result of inexplicable and purposeless causes. It raises questions about every tendency of human beings to absolutize ownership. To whom do we think practically and operationally the world belongs? To a roster of nations? To the state? To corporations? To whoever has money to get title to pieces of it? The confession qualifies every conceivable answer to such questions" (James Luther Mays, Psalms, p. 120). We may be uncomfortable with the idea of God owning everything, including us, but we cannot escape this claim to that very reality. This idea of everything belonging to the Lord is what moves us into the next section. The next strophe, in verses 3-6, calls us then to,

Desire the Presence and Blessings of The Lord

The language used in verse 3 is striking when considering the historical context. Look at verses 3-6, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? 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. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah"

The “hill of the Lord” and “his holy place” are common references to the temple on Mount Zion. Yet, if this commemorates David bringing the ark into Jerusalem, the temple had yet to be built. This indicates David was looking beyond this moment to its eventual reality. However, I am persuaded he was looking even further beyond the establishment of the physical temple on Mount Zion, and his true hope was set on eternal realities. We will discover this as we progress to the psalm’s climax. For now, consider the purpose of the question. Alec Motyer notes, “Ascend,” is to “go up where the Lord is (Ex. 19:3);” and “stand,” is to “rise’ to worship (Ex 33:10), to plead a cause (Ex 1:5), to hold one’s ground (Jos. 7:12) before such a God” (J. Alec Motyer, *The New Bible Commentary*, p. 501). So the idea is, who has the ability to be in the presence of the Holy God? Only those who personify the ideas of verse 4, which we need to understand through its parallelism. This means, rather than each statement being a separate point, each join together to communicate one main truth. “Clean” and “pure” are ethical terms rather than ritual purification terms. When read together, we understand clean hands as not merely an outward cleansing but connected to inward purity of heart. Not lifting one’s soul to what is false refers to idolatry, and swearing deceitfully involves one’s dealing with others. These parallel lines speak to consistent, undivided loyalty, truthfulness, and faithfulness to the Lord and His ways. And before we confuse this as something we can achieve, note how verse 5 shows the result of this is the blessing of righteousness from God. And verse 6 says this is the pattern of those who seek the face of God. Family, the idea isn’t to purify yourself to receive blessing. It is to seek the intimate presence of God that brings righteousness as His blessing, the result of which is the inward faithfulness of verse 4. Consider what Jesus says of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-40, “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’” All the law depends on inward faithfulness to the Lord, not ritual or outward cleansing. God’s design from the beginning has always been a life of faith in His ability to provide righteousness outside of ourselves. God doesn’t help those who help themselves. He helps those who know they cannot help themselves. Those who know He is the owner of all things. He is the giver of every good gift. And He is the one who blesses those who seek His face. This is why we will sing later, “give us clean hands and pure hearts.” This psalm shapes us to desire the presence of God to receive the blessing of His righteousness. Finally, the climax in the final strophe of verses 7-10, calls us to,

Believe The King of Glory has Entered the Gates

When we understand these final verses through the gospel, they produce an eternal song for our hearts to sing. Look at verses 7-10, “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah” The idea of lifting up your head is one of joy and celebration. When speaking of the gates and ancient doors, the imagery is of a city, a palace, or the entrance to the temple precincts. What causes this kind of joy and celebration? The King of Glory is entering. “King of Glory” is mentioned five times in these three verses and no where else in the Old Testament. The only other reference close to it in Scripture is 1 Corinthians 2:8 where Paul, speaking of God’s wisdom in the gospel, says, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” David makes two things clear about the King of Glory. First, this is the Lord of hosts, referencing the angelic armies who praise God and carry out His decisions in the world. Second, He is strong and mighty in battle, depicted as returning with the spoils of victory. While this is reminiscent of David’s victory in returning the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, it is more reminiscent of the greater victory of Christ after defeating Satan, sin, and death. Family, what do we understand to have taken place when Christ ascended to the Father’s right hand?

Ephesians 1:20-22 says God the Father, “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet.” 1 Corinthians 15:24-25 says Christ, “delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” We are not waiting for Jesus to receive His throne and begin His reign. At His ascension, Christ was seated on His throne, and He has been reigning from there since. Now, let’s connect this to our Psalm with the help of Hebrews 11 and 12. Turn to the end of Hebrews 11 with me. In Hebrews 11:32-34, David is mentioned as one who conquered kingdoms and put armies to flight. Yet, verses 39-40 tell us David, like others, never received the fullness of God’s promises and was looking for something better. Hebrews 12:1-2, then tells us, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” The cloud of witnesses, including David, call us to run the race in this life like Jesus, who endured the cross and despised the shame because of the joy that was set before Him. What was that joy? That joy was being seated at the right hand of the throne of God. It was the spoils of His victory in battle, His rule and reign over all things. Following this, the author of Hebrews calls us to not grow weary in running this race because of that joy set before us. Then, he communicates this profound truth in Hebrews 12:22-24, saying, “you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” What does that festal gathering sound like? It sounds like the joyful lifting of heads as Christ entered the gates of the true Mount Zion. Like the angels and saints welcoming the King of Glory, strong and mighty, as He returned from battle with the spoils of victory. In Ephesians 4, Paul talks of Christ leading a host of captives and giving gifts to men at His ascension. That is the language of a mighty King returning with the spoils of His victory. See, I am persuaded these words of Psalm 24:7-10 are the shouts of joy proclaimed at Christ’s ascension following His victory over Satan, sin and death. This is the way many of the early church fathers understood this passage, as the gates of heaven commanded to open for the King of Glory to enter and assume His throne following His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (Didymus the Blind, Commentary on Psalm 24 , p. 70; a similar interpretation appears Origen, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Augustine). As J. Josh Smith sums up well, “Our Warrior-King, the Lord’s anointed Son, has engaged the forces of evil and destroyed death by his death. Having finished the enemy off on the field of battle, he took a brief repose in a throne room of a tomb before bursting forth in glorious resurrection. Remaining for forty days to prepare his troops for further battles, he then climbed the hill known as Mount Olivet. He ascended from the earth into heaven (Luke 24; Acts 1). He took “the captives captive; he gave gifts to people,” and he “ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things” (Eph 4:8-10). Ascending into the presence of the holy sanctuary in heaven, he has entered in as our high priest, “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Heb 7:26). Here is our ascended King-Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110) ...So we proclaim his glory now, and celebrate his fame. The Lord of might in battle reigns, King Jesus is his name, King Jesus is his name” (J. Josh Smith, Exalting Jesus in Psalm 1-50, p. 186).

Conclusion:

So, as the worship team comes for our time of response, today is a day to lift up our heads in joy over what Christ has done. Our Warrior-King, Jesus Christ, has ascended God’s holy hill to stand forever in the Father’s presence with our names written in His wounds. He has paid it all, giving us clean hands and pure hearts through His cleansing blood. In His victory, we are united with Him to receive righteousness from the God of our salvation and the Spirit to transform our motives and affections.

And we have come to Mount Zion to join in the joyful festal gathering of our King of Glory. He has won. We know how the story ends. This is our joyful song today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. And one day, it will be fully realized as He returns to usher in the new heavens and new earth, where we will delight in the presence of God forever. For now, through faith in Jesus Christ, we confidently say with Psalm 118:19-24, "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Would you pray with me as we prepare to respond?