

*Restoring Your Soul Through Psalms*  
***Be Lifted Up!***  
*Psalm 24*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Psalm 24 closes with a stirring command for ancient doors to open to receive the King of glory. I have to admit, I'm a goner over ancient doors, especially church doors.



700 year old yew trees stand guard outside the church of St. Edward's in the village of Stow-on-the-Wold in England. Don't you just want to go in there? You know something mystic and holy is going on inside, and has been for a long time.

stop looking at  
"Lift up your  
ancient doors, that  
doors. Thresholds.  
wondrous inside.  
next.



In Rome, the magnificent church of St. Paul's outside the walls has enormous entrance doors. They are over 30 feet high, and only fully open during especially important services. I couldn't them, the words echoing in my mind, heads, O gates, and be lifted up you the King of glory may come in." I love Entrances. The promise of something The crossing over from one world to the

So of course this scene moves me. The king has fought through great struggles to reach the refuge where his last army awaits a siege. They have all but lost hope that he will come to them before the attack. But then he bursts through huge mighty doors to give them hope.. Take a look at this:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6y1MH7Yd1JU>



I saw one meme that wrote across this picture, “You may be cool, but you’ll never be Aragorn coming through the gates cool.” Indeed. The king arriving from battle to gain entry to his city is a mighty image.

Our psalm this morning is all about a victory procession in which the King of glory, the LORD I AM, arrives back in the city that bears his name. In David’s time, this was symbolized by bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem after a mighty victory over the Philistines. Jerusalem was built on a high hill, so every entry into the city or its temple was a going-up. Psalm 24 is an ascension psalm. The going up as king David returned home. The ascending of the LORD in the ark of the covenant back to its place in the holy of holies. And then, ever since the time of Jesus, Psalm 24 has been connected with Jesus’ ascent to heaven.

Let’s take a closer look. This Psalm has three sections. Section 1 declares just who we’re talking about as the true King:

The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof,  
The world and all that dwell therein.

God’s people considered the Holy of holies in Jerusalem to be the very center of the world, the place where the one true God caused his name to dwell. That did not mean that God was limited to a little tabernacle on a hill. The earth is the LORD’s, and everything that is in it belongs to him. When Jacob was little, we loved to play “King of this.” Usually the bed was the kingdom you wanted to rule. “I’m king of this!” one of us would declare. “No you’re not!” the other would reply. That meant we had to wrestle for it until one of us got thrown off.

“King of this” was a game we used to play for a few minutes. It was great fun. But it was always set against a back drop of another reality. Actually, the whole house belonged to Rhonda and me. We can play all we want for dominance of the bed, but in the end, the parents are keeping the lights on, paying the taxes and maintaining the property. That’s why the game is fun, because you don’t really have to share the burden of the house. That’s an illustration of us in God’s world. “King of this!” we might cry out. And for a little while, like the few decades of our life, we might think we really do own a patch of earth or have some power over the world. But God’s people know what we get to do is always set against the back drop that the earth is the LORD’s. He owns it all. He maintains it all. And we don’t belong to ourselves, but to him. This is true no matter how loud the voice or how big the earthly power. Lots of people and groups and companies

strut, "I'm King of this!" But we know better. The earth is the LORD's, and all that dwells in it.

So the historical backdrop is that King David is leading the victory parade back to Jerusalem. They have the sacred ark of the covenant which represents God's presence. They're going up the holy hill to Jerusalem. But in writing this psalm, David knew a lot more was going on than just this one moment. Going up to Jerusalem to acknowledge the true King was an entire way of life. The victory parade was a dramatic hour that revealed the purpose of God's people. We want our lives to be travelling upwards. We want to live constantly in the presence of our God, obeying him and glorifying him by our life and work. Going up the hill in the parade is just a snap shot for the purpose of life.

So the second section of the psalm asks a question that takes it deeper,

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

In other words, who gets to stay without worry in the presence of the one who owns the whole earth, the one who burns with holy fire? The answer:

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.

Suddenly, the crowd at the parade got thinner. You want to go up to the presence of the LORD? Check your heart. Check your worship. Check what you grip in your hands as you spend your days. Check how you deal with people. Clean, pure and true gets you in.

Crash! And we were having such a good time! Suddenly all confidence is gone. Our friend Malcolm Guite expressed this in his response to Psalm 24:

But who can rise up to that holy place?  
Can all its splendours really be for me?

Before that holy fire I hide my face  
My hands were never clean, as for my heart  
He'll search out its impurity and trace

The sources of its sin in every part,

And in the whole, its weariness and stain.  
Who can ascend? I cannot even start.

Isn't that the truth? If clean hands and a pure heart are the requirement, I can't even start up that hill. Thankfully, we're not left there. Malcolm goes on:

But even as I fear my hopes are vain  
My saviour comes, his love revives my hope  
I feel him search my wounds, deal with my pain,

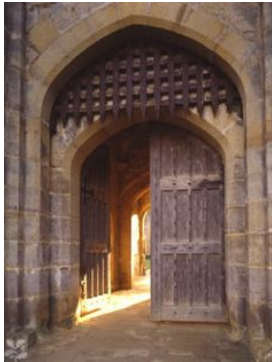
And offer me again the healing cup.  
Raising my head, he says: Now rise with me  
The gates will open for us both, look up!<sup>1</sup>

One comes along side us. He brings a healing, forgiving touch. And as we stand outside the mighty gates that appear closed to the likes of us, he speaks so tenderly. Lift up your head. Lift up your heart. You're with me. "The gates will open for us both, look up!"

It makes all the difference who you're with. If I drive over to the LSU practice facility and try to get in to see that amazing indoor field, or the space age weight room, I'm not getting in. Even if I say, "Please, I can't take it anymore, I just need some football." Not gonna happen. But if I show up with our elder, coach Jerry Stovall, the gates open. They don't look at me, they look at him, and the doors open. I stay close. Because my only access is with coach.

What human is getting into the presence of God? Only the one with clean hands and a pure heart and perfect integrity. For a thousand years after David wrote this psalm, there was no such person. Once a year the high priest could go into the Holy of holies. He went to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. But even the high priest had to cleanse himself first. He had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins before he went to make the atonement. Because there was no one who could just go in. Then Jesus appeared. The man fully devoted to his Father. The man fully devoted to all men and women. He made a sacrifice for sin. Not for his own sins, he had none. But for the sins of the world. The sacrifice was himself. He shed his lifeblood on the cross and then the Father gave it back to him on Easter morning. Jesus rose. But there was another step. He had to finish making "the new and living way" (Hebrews 10: 20) back to his Father.

So the book of Hebrews connects all the dots for us. Christ our high priest went into the real temple, not an earthly one. He went into the Holy of holies to appear before the Father on our behalf. He completed the atonement by bringing his blood into the presence of God. The one true and righteous man ascended into heaven to complete the offering of his sacrifice for our sins. He's the guy with the access. He's the one to whom the gates open. Hebrews tells us that Jesus "entered once for all into the holy places...by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9: 12). Access is open in him.



How do we get in on that? How do we get joined to the only one who can open heaven's gates to us? We open the gates of *our* hearts and souls. We realize that Christ Jesus arrives at the doors of every heart and calls to us. "Be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!" This is the pressure we feel when we have been far from God and his Spirit seems to be asking for us to welcome his presence into our lives. He urges us. "Hey, look up from your life! God is real. The earth and all that is in it belongs to him. You belong to him. He wants you to open the gates of your life to him. He wants to fill you with his presence. He wants to cleanse you and to heal you. He wants to bring you home."

The gates to God's presence only open to Jesus, the one who lived with clean hands and a pure heart. We only get joined to Jesus when we open the gates of our hearts to him. That's once for all for salvation. That's also every single day of our lives for fellowship and mission. Lift up your hearts! Jesus declares that the gates will open for both of us, if we go with him. He asks us, urges us to lift up our eyes and see him. The King of glory wants to enter our hearts so he can take us with him into his Father's presence. That's eternal life that continues now.

We need his help for this. I can't get through the gates to know God on my own. But I can't even open the gates to my heart on my own. I need the Spirit of Christ to enable me. I need to ask him to help me open the doors, and if necessary to just rip the gates off the hinges, whatever it takes to come inside and cleanse my heart and fill it up with his love. Listen to this stunning prayer by James Janeway:

Open quickly, you that had rather have God for your friend, than for your enemy. Oh, why should not the soul of every sinner cry out, "Lord, the door is locked, and you have the key; I have been trying what I can do, but the [locks] are so rusty that I cannot possibly turn the key. But, Lord, throw the door off the hinges, do anything in the world, so you will but come in and dwell here. Come,

O mighty God, break through doors of iron, and bars of brass, and make way for yourself by your love and power. Come, Lord, and make yourself welcome; all that I have is at your service; O fit my soul to entertain you!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From Malcolm Guite's forthcoming book *David's Crown: A Response to the Psalms*, <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2020/06/23/who-shall-ascend-a-response-to-psalm-24/>

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), p. 385