

Psalm 24

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[0 : 00] And if you weren't here last week, the context of why we're looking at Psalm 24 is we're doing a series on the Psalms where we're looking at different Psalms and our series is called Songs for Life.

And I didn't come up with that title so I can say this, but I think it's a great title, whoever came up with it. Because when you call the Psalms Songs for Life, you're assuming that these Psalms have a relevance that goes beyond the fact that we sing them on Sunday morning as important as that is. And these Psalms actually speak to the human experience in all of its diversity. There was a pastor named Eugene Peterson who wrote a book about the Psalms. He also wrote the Message Bible, but he opened his book about the Psalms like this.

He said, people look into mirrors to see how they look. They look into the Psalms to find out who they are. And I don't know if you've ever had this experience, but if you really read the Psalms in the midst of your own joys and sorrows, you may find that when you come to the Psalms, you find words to describe feelings that you have that you didn't know how to describe.

It speaks to the whole human experience from joy to sorrow to sadness to love and fear and pain. And so when you look at the Psalms, there is a real sense in which we really do see ourselves, who we are and who we were meant to be.

[1 : 20] And when we look at Psalm 24, I think part of what Psalm 24, in connection with that, assumes, is that as human beings, we were made to worship.

As humans, we were all made to worship. And if you're here long enough, you'll hear us make reference to the fact that we believe that whether you're worshipping God or not, we're all worshipping something. We all choose to place our hope in something.

And our claim this morning is that we should be worshipping our maker, our creator, the God of Jesus Christ. And I have to say, when we come to Psalm 24, the hard part about preaching it is, it's almost three different stories.

What you have in Psalm 24 is three different pictures. And when you read them through, I don't know if you caught this when you read it, but you'll probably get a sense for this now that you're paying attention to it. It's hard to figure out what actually connects the three different pictures in Psalm 24.

So maybe I should just preach three sermons this morning and we could really get the full effect of it. But what I'm actually going to do in my great mercy will be to, I want to suggest that what does connect these three stories in Psalm 24 is that each one tells us something about the God that we worship in such a way that it actually changes.

[2 : 32] It doesn't affect just our view of God, but it also changes the way that we live our lives or that we should live our lives. So all I want to do this morning is look at these three pictures and say what each one of them says about our God and how that changes the way that we should walk out these tours on Sunday morning.

So the first picture is in verses one and two. And what this picture tells us is that our God is great. Or as I told the kids a few minutes ago, our God is big. He's really big.

He's great. And you see this in the first two verses. He says, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. And so in this image, David is taking this 10,000 foot view.

He's imagining you taking all the way to the top of the earth where you can see the curvature. And he's saying everything that you can see with your eyes on this world belongs to God.

It's his. And not just the land, but the creatures that are in it and the people that are in it. There's a real sense in which everything here is God's.

[3 : 33] And the reason that David says that he can make this claim is in verse two. He says it's his because he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

And it's his because he made it. That's a fair claim. If you make something, it belongs to you. And that's why God can say this whole world is his. And if you've been a Christian for any length of time, what I'm saying is it's not new information that this world belongs to God and that it's his.

And we tell our kids he holds the whole world in his hands. But you know, it's one thing to say, I know that this world belongs to God. There's another to know that and to believe it in such a way that actually changes the way that you live your life.

And that's the harder part, but it's the more joyful part. One way one way that it changes the way that we understand our world is that it this is a truth that we can tell our fears.

And Jesus does this in Matthew chapter six. There was a time in Jesus's ministry when he can see that his disciples are anxious about really simple but fundamental things like where is our next meal going to come from and where are we going to get our clothes and they're traveling around with Jesus.

[4 : 44] So these are, you know, it's not like they know where the next meal is going to come from actually. And what Jesus tells them is he says, go look at the flowers.

If you're feeling anxious, go look at the flowers. This is Matthew chapter six. He says, look how God has clothed the flowers in splendor. He takes care of them. And he says, and it's a logical argument.

He looks at his disciples and he says, if that's how God closed the grass in this beautiful, like these beautiful flowers that are the prettiest things we've ever seen it, that's how God takes care of the grass, which is here today and gone tomorrow.

Don't you think that God will take care of you? And then he says, that's what, and he ends up by saying, oh, you have little faith. And what Jesus is telling his disciples is when you're convinced that this world actually belongs to God, that is something that you can tell your fears and anxieties about the future because there is so much we don't know about tomorrow.

And we probably know less than we think we do. But at least we know that this world is his and he takes care of it. And it's like, you know, maybe if you remember when you were a child and you were afraid of the dark, you may have been afraid and you may have stayed afraid.

[5 : 58] But the one thing that gave you comfort was knowing that mom and dad or grandma and granddad were in the next room. That's what Jesus is saying, like, know that God, he's not on some galaxy three light years away from us.

Well, he is actually. But he's also right here with us and he takes care of this place. That's something we can tell our fears. But also this fact that the world is God's also gives us a deep sense of responsibility, doesn't it?

Because the world doesn't belong to us and nothing in this world in the truest sense belongs to us. You know, one of the first words that a child learns is mine, right? I mean, I have seen a two year old viciously rip a toy out of another two year old's hands.

I see it quite a bit, actually. We learn mine and even when you grow up, you don't care about toys anymore, but you keep that word mine. And it's my money. It's my house.

It's these are my gifts. And you know, we can use the word mine, but we have to realize that in the most fundamental sense, everything that we have is God's and it's a gift that God gave us and Psalm 24 pushes back and he says, is there anything in this world that you can actually say is truly mine?

[7 : 07] And the answer is no, it's all God's. And now I'm not suggesting the next time somebody walks into your house and they compliment you on how well decorated it is, you don't say, well, thank you, but you know, this is actually God's house, right?

That would be like a weird form of legalism. But the point is, when as Christians, we say something is mine. We mean something different than the rest of the world means. What we mean is when we say it's mine, we mean God for a season has given me stewardship over this part of his creation. And while it's mine, he has asked me to take care of it. And it's not just our money. It's not just our house. It's also our gifts. I mean, some of us are good singers, some of us are intellectual, some of us are wise, some of us are strong.

Some of us may look at ourselves and not see much that's praiseworthy, but God has nonetheless given us gifts. And all of those gifts are things that we're called not to say this is mine and how can I

benefit from it?

Our first question is, how can I use this to serve the Lord and to serve my neighbor? And no one described this better than Jesus whenever he tells the parable of the talents.

[8 : 19] There's a story where Jesus says there was a man who goes on a journey. And before he goes on a journey, he gives three of his servants different amounts of money.

And he tells the servants to take care of the money while he's gone. And when he comes back, two of the servants, by coincidence, the two of the servants that he'd given the most money to come back to him and they have invested his money and done it to do more things.

And then one of the servants was, he just buried his money and he didn't do anything with it. And Jesus uses that parable to tell us that God has given all of us all kinds of gifts.

And we're called to steward that well. And just as a side note, what I also love about that parable is we're not all called to be the greatest world changers.

There are some of us were actually just given fewer talents. But God says, use what you have. Use what I've given you and do wonderful things with it. Okay, so anyway, that's verses one and two.

[9 : 22] God, this world is His and that changes the way that we live in our world. He is great. The second thing this chapter tells us is that God is good. And you see this in verses three and six, three to six.

So you come to verses three to six and it's a different image, right? And what you're imagining is this is someone who is about to go worship at the temple in Jerusalem and they're asking themselves heart questions before they do that.

And the questions are this, who can ascend to the hill of the Lord, which is where the temple was, and who shall stand in his holy place? And those are very specific questions, which in one sense are not relevant to us because we don't go worship God at his temple in Jerusalem.

But they're pointing, obviously they're pointing to much more heart questions like who in the most general sense, who has the right to stand before God? And what do I need to do so that I can worship Him?

What can I do to draw near to Him? And that's where the connection is made with us. And it's an important question, but what I want you to notice is how these verses, as much as they talk about who we should be, they're also telling us something about who God is.

[10 : 33] Think about all the answers that God could have given to that question, who can ascend this mountain? I mean, he could have said, if you want to ascend this mountain, you need to be wealthy so that you can bring costly sacrifices.

Or if you want to ascend this mountain, you need to be a great man, you need to be powerful, you need to be a president. Or if you want to ascend this mountain, you need to be successful in your job, you need to prove that you're one of the top people in your career, so you're worried that you come up here or that you make good marks.

And there are places in this world, aren't there? There's quite a few places where that is the standard to get into the room. And if you don't have it, you'll never get into the room. And a lot of us will never get into the rooms like that.

But that's not God's standard for entering into His holy place. What does He say? Not the powerful, not the wealthy, not the wise, but who? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

And when we read something like this, we automatically want to say, where do I fit into this? But let's just step back for a minute and say, isn't that beautiful that the God of this universe, what He cares about is not how much money you have or how powerful you are or how successful you are.

[11 : 46] What He cares about is your heart. And not just are your hands clean, but is your heart clean. And then He goes on to talk about what He wants from His worshipers.

He says a true worshiper is someone who does not lift up his soul to what is false. So a true worshiper doesn't worship other gods or other things that we act like are gods like money or sex. And then finally He says a true worshiper is someone who doesn't swear deceitfully. So God says what I'm looking for in my people is someone who is just as truthful in their workplace as they are in the sanctuary.

And again, all of that points to the fact that this God that we want to worship is a good God. He is good and He's holy. And you may read this list of what it takes to enter into the holy temple.

You may say, God may be good, but this is not good news for me because my heart is not pure and I get carried away sometimes loving other things in this world more than I love God.

[12 : 48] And that's the case for all of us, right? We believe as Christians that all of us are sinners and there are fundamental sinful flaws in each one of us that make us impure.

But not once in this Psalm, you may have thought it did, but not once in this Psalm do you find God saying that He is not merciful.

Think about the fact that the person who wrote this Psalm about how holy God wants us to be is also the person who in Psalm 51 cries out to God and says, God, have mercy on me.

David was so convinced about how sinful he was that he says, I don't just need to be, you know, I don't just need to be washed a little bit. I need a new heart.

And the temple was the very place in Jerusalem where you would go if you needed your sins atoned for. And so it may feel like there's a tension between how perfect God is calling us to be and his mercy.

[13 : 55] But the way that this connects is that God's mercy is the fact that he, well, he died for us and he covered our sins, but he doesn't want to leave us there. He wants to renew our hearts so that what we find in Psalm 24 can be true of us so that day by day God is cleansing us so that we do have more pure hearts every day.

As Christians, we believe in God's goodness. We believe that God's mercy is part of his goodness. But that mercy doesn't mean that these verses no longer matter. Part of God's mercy is that he doesn't leave us.

He changes our hearts. So that's why we can sing this Psalm still. I remember one time, this was just a radical shift in my mind.

I remember being in a Bible study one time and there was a much older woman. I won't tell you how old she is because I don't, well, I don't want to say an age and then tell you that you're old.

Anyway, an older woman than myself and she was saying that for her whole life as a, she became a Christian in her early 20s. And for her whole life, she struggled with gossip and she just day after day, year after year, year after year, year after year, year after year, year after year, year after year.

[15 : 08] She prayed that God would help her. And it wasn't until she was into her 60s that she felt like she could finally look back and say, this sin has been conquered in me. And that was revolutionary for me because when I became a Christian, I thought I was going to be completely purified right then and there.

And God did justify me right then and there. But then the whole rest of our lives is crying out to God saying, God, would you give me a clean heart because I know that a clean heart is good and I want that and I want to be near you.

So let me make this just a little bit more specific before I go on to my next point. If you have found yourself struggling with a particular sin this past week, whether that be greed or gossip or lust or anger, there's always a temptation to come to a chapter like this and say, I can't be near God because I'm just too unholy.

I can't even cry out to him. But remember that the same David who understood how holy God was also knew that he could cry out to him and ask him, make Psalm 24 true of me.

Make me into a worshiper who can come into your presence. There was an old preacher named St. Augustine a long, long time ago and he described this perfectly.

[16 : 28] He said, this was a prayer he gave to God. He said, God, command what you will and give what you command. In other words, God, command me to be holy, but also help me to be holy.

Don't leave me alone in this process. And that's what we have in God as a God who calls us to be holy, but who we can cry out to in mercy and who will help us. Okay, so now we're coming to our last section.

So God is great, he's good, and then finally he's close. And we see this in the last four verses. The last section of this Psalm imagines like a particular literal day in the history of God's people.

At least this is what most commentators think. And this was the day whenever the Ark of the Covenant for the first time was brought into Jerusalem. You may remember the story whenever it was brought in and David is dancing around the Ark, he's so excited and he gets in trouble with his wife about it, but that's a different story.

Anyway, so the Ark comes into Jerusalem and a lot of people think that this Psalm was sung every year after that to reenact that joyful moment when God's Ark comes into Jerusalem.

[17 : 43] And the reason the Ark was so significant was because, well, the Ark was this chest that was made just after the Exodus and it was into it, they put the physical 10 commandments that God

gave Moses.

But the reason it meant so much to God's people was because this is where God's presence dwelt among his people. So after the Exodus, when God's people were traveling around the wilderness, they would set up a giant tent around the Ark.

And Moses would go into that tent and it was at the Ark that Moses would talk to God. So this may seem a bit foreign to you, but after David died, so that was long before David, after David dies, his son Solomon builds the temple.

And in the center of the temple, he puts that very same Ark. And the room that that Ark is in is a room called the Holy of Holies. And every year, the chief priests would go in and that's where he would make a tomet for the sins of the people.

And what the Ark meant in the mind of the people, if you were living in 800 BC in Jerusalem and you were just an average citizen, you would look up at the temple mountain and the comfort you would take from looking at that temple is knowing in there is the presence of God.

[19 : 04] And that means that God is close to us. He's come to be with us and he's present with us. And I mean, presence is a big deal in the human experience, right? I mean, if you've ever known someone who's suffering, gone through a trial, maybe they've lost a loved one or they've lost a job, you know that sometimes what people want more than anything else is not someone who can explain their suffering or someone who can tell them it'll all be better.

But what we want is someone who just will be present with us. And that's why you'll hear sometimes people say, the best ministry you can give to someone who's suffering is a ministry of presence. Just be with them. And certainly that's true of the Ark. I mean, God looks down at the Exodus. He looks down at his people who are suffering in slavery.

And he tells Moses, I've come down because I've heard the cries of my people. So we see that God is a compassionate God who comes down in his compassion to be present with his people.

But the Ark's ministry of presence was more than just, you know, God saying, I've come in solidarity with you. I've come just to be with you and you're suffering. The presence of the Ark wasn't just presence.

[20 : 13] It was powerful presence. It was a presence that could do something. And so, you know, what does God do in the Exodus? He rescues his people and he takes them out. And through the Ark, he leads them in the wilderness to a promised land and he makes them into a new nation.

So and you see that captured in this passage that when the people saw the Ark, they didn't just see, here is God with us. They say, here is the powerful God who's with us. And I want to just read the scene carefully because it's such an interesting scene.

So what we have here is the Ark has come to the gates, either the city of Jerusalem or somewhere deeper in Jerusalem. And the priests are carrying the Ark and look at what they shout out.

They say, lift up your heads, O gates, that the King of glory may come in. And you know, they're saying, here is the presence of God with us.

Open the door so that we can come in and look at the response of the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers say, who is this King of glory? And the priests respond in verse eight, the Lord, Yahweh, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

[21 : 22] Now and that keeps going for a few verses and on the face of it, it seems totally absurd because here you have the priests bringing the literal presence of God into Jerusalem and the gatekeepers won't let them in.

And it's like the gatekeepers have been given a very specific list of who can come in and King of glory isn't on the list, so they're not going to open the gates. But that's not what's happening.

This is a song. It's a song of praise. And like the poetic effect of the gatekeepers asking for more information about this King of hosts is that it gives the priests more of a chance to praise how great this God is.

So it's like they're with joy, they're shouting, who is this King of glory? So the priests can say even more about how great he is. And the gist of what the priests say is this King of glory is a warrior. He's mighty in battle. He's a champion of battles. And that meant, again, not just that God was present with his people, but that presence made a real difference in their lives.

[22 : 26] Because if you could look up at that temple and see that that was where the presence of God dwelt, you knew God is with us and he is powerful. This is the big God who made the whole world and he's with us.

And now if I could summarize about 400 years of history in one sentence, I would say sometime after this, the Israelites rejected God and they walked away from him.

And because of that, God removed his presence from among the people and the ark was lost. And so there's this tragedy that marks the end of the Old Testament where God's presence is not with us in a very real sense.

And then you get to John, the book of John chapter one in the New Testament. And John describes Jesus like this. He says, the word, which was God, became flesh.

In Jesus, the word became flesh. God became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us and we have seen his glory.

[23 : 29] So in the Old Testament, the ark was the glory of God dwelling among his people. And John says that when Jesus came, he's reflecting back on Jesus.

He said, when Jesus came, once again, God's glory dwelt among his people and we saw it with our own eyes. That's why the Gospel of John is a great book to read if you're looking for something to pick up.

But in the New Testament, there's all these illusions to the fact that once again, God has come to dwell among his people. And if that's true, if there's this connection between the ark dwelling, which is God dwelling among his people and Jesus, which is God dwelling among his people in the New Testament, what does Psalm 24 tell us about Jesus?

That's my question. I'm getting to a close here. It tells us that Jesus is a warrior, that everything that's true of Psalm 24, all of these descriptions are true of Jesus, that he's the King of glory.

He's the Lord, strong and mighty in battle, which may seem kind of counterintuitive when you read the story of Jesus and his life ends in tragedy. He goes to a cross.

[24 : 45] But as Christians, we believe that's not the end of the story and that even though Jesus looked like the unwilling sufferer who pays the penalty for our sins, he went to the cross to be victorious over sins.

And he is strong and mighty in battle. And it's not just that he was strong and mighty in battle at the cross. And this is where I want to land. Jesus as a warrior who is present with us tells us that when we walk out these doors this morning, Jesus, strong and mighty and in battle and a warrior is present with us in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in Ephesians, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

And that's a lot of evil. But the hope that we have is the hope that God is close to us in Jesus Christ. Not just so that we can battle the world outside of ourselves, but back to that idea of God's holiness and us wanting to draw near to Him even though we're sinners. We need God to conquer our own hearts and to subdue the sin that's within us.

[26 : 04] And whenever Charles Spurgeon, the old Baptist preacher was talking about this passage and about how Jesus is the warrior that's foreshadowed here, he says, believers worship the Lord Jesus because of his conquest in them, inside of them.

Since the arrows of their natural hatred are snapped and the weapons of their rebellion are broken, what victories grace has won in our evil hearts.

So the hope we have this morning is not just that he's great, he is great. And it's not just that he's good, but it's also that his greatness and his goodness have come to dwell in us.

And they change our hearts so that when we walk out these doors on Sunday morning, we're different people because of what Jesus has done. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your Word and we praise You that we can read something written 3,000 years ago.

And it can still speak to us because You're the God who never changes. And we thank You for Jesus and we pray that You would remind us and take hope in the fact that He dwells in our hearts. In Your Son's name we pray.

[27 : 11] Amen.