A Portrait of the King

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Preacher: David Court

[0:00] We're going to read God's word together and Mary, one of our staff, is going to come and lead us in reading before David comes to teach. Psalm 24, a Psalm of David. 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. 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. Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
Who is the 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. Thank you, Mary. A few years ago, the first official portrait of King Charles was revealed to the public, painted by the renowned artist Jonathan Yeo.
[1:22] The canvas is large, eight and a half feet by six and a half feet, features His Majesty wearing the uniform of the Welsh Guards, of which he, I think, is their regimental colonel.

It's a very striking, very unusual picture or portrait. It's one that's created no shortage of comments at the time.
Some people really loved it. Other people really hated it. There was an unveiling ceremony in Draper's Hall in London, and the artist there spoke of his gratitude for being given the opportunity to capture such an extraordinary and unique person, especially at the historic moment of becoming King.
This morning, I'd like us to turn to look at, as it were, the portrait of another King. Not an earthly King or ruler, however. Here is an altogether greater King being portrayed for us in Psalm 24.
Here is the one who was truly King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And the focus of the psalm is upon Yahweh, upon God as King.
[2:38] In each of its three sections, it is revealed to us and celebrates a different aspect of God's kingly character and rule. And it's a psalm that kind of challenges us not just to observe and to look, but one that invites us to welcome this God, this King, into our very own lives.

So what I want to do, very briefly, I always say briefly, it never really ends up that way, but I'll say it anyway, briefly, at each of these kind of three stanzas, as it were, and see if the psalmist can help us see the one who is the King of Kings clearly and accurately.
So the first stanza we have, I think, what we'll call the King of Creation. Look at verses 1 and 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.
So the psalmist begins in a very bold, uncompromising fashion. He declares that the earth and all that fills it belongs to Yahweh and to no other.
All within it, all who live in it belong to Him. Everything is His. He owns it all. He is this world's true proprietor.
[4:03] The old chorus puts it, He has the whole world in His hands. The God of the Bible is not some parochial deity.

He is Lord over all the earth, the God of creation, before whom all people stand accountable as individuals, as communities, and as nations.
And this is not something that the Bible discusses or debates or argues about. It simply declares it. It assumes it. Everything is His.

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This is the fundamental reality that underpins all human existence. The psalmist says here, He alone has laid the foundations of the world upon the seas and continues to maintain it upon the waters.
And that means that He is both creator and sustainer of all things. And the language there is very much designed to convey a sense of stability.
[5:12] We'll look at the words there. Founded it. Established it. Yahweh has done this because, and so there is structure and solidity and shape to everything that has been made.

There is pattern. There is pattern. This is not a world of total unpredictability. It's not a world of complete chaos and disorder, because there is one who is in control.
There is one who stands above the earth and its inhabitants. There is one who continues to uphold and to sustain all that He has made. In the ancient world of the psalmist, the nations around Israel worshipped a plethora of different pagan deities.
Scholars often note how many of these societies were very anxious and fearful cultures. And I think that's down to the very nature of paganism itself.
These various gods were competing and vying with one another all the time. No one, it appeared, was in control. Nothing was certain. Nothing was sure.
[6:24] Nothing could be trusted. A truly fearful and anxious world. Interestingly, it's increasingly the kind of world that we seem to be living in today.

An age of perpetual anxiety. Modern technology, rather than bring promised peace and stability, has instead, it seems, created a society that is constantly unsettled, uncertain, on edge.
The very systems designed to provide information and connection have instead fueled fear and division and instability. We, it seems, live in an increasingly fragmented, fragile, and anxious world.
And yet the call here is not to live in fear, but to live in faith. To live with faith in the living God, in the one who is the king over all his creation.
And this is what the psalmist is highlighting here in these opening words. They enshrine a very different perspective to the fear-filled world of ancient paganism.
[7:38] The psalmist tells us here, there is someone in control. There is one who holds it all together. There is one God, the Lord, to whom all the earth and, indeed, the whole world belong.

There is a king who sits on the throne of the universe. And that is a wonderful truth designed to bring us comfort and consolation amid the restlessness and fear that so often threatens to cast us down.
Herman Bavinck, in his book, The Wonderful Works of God, says this, The despondent Christian, by a faith in God's creation and providence, raises his head up high.
No devil but God the Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, created the world. It is in its entirety and in its parts the work of his hands and of his hands alone.
Once he created it, he did not let it go. Friends, this sometimes crazy world of disasters and calamities, disappointments and death, sickness and sin, of wickedness and great evil.
[8:54] Friends, it is still God's world. He has not let it go, and he has promised never to let it go, because he is in the business of redeeming and renewing this fallen creation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

To quote Bavinck again, Behind all secondary causes there lurks and works the almighty will of an almighty God and a faithful Father.
And so, as we explore this universe, as we enjoy this world that God has made, as we work in it, as we discover more of its grandeur and beauty, we come to see that it's all the theater of his glory.
We come to see and wonder at the one who lies behind it all. Yes, we live in a fallen world and a broken world and a sinful world, but nonetheless, it is still God's world.
And in the New Testament, we discover that it's in Jesus, the eternal Son of God, that all things have come into being and indeed are held together. Paul tells the Christians at Colossae, Jesus Christ is this world's true ruler and king.
[10:21] He is the king of creation, And as such, he calls all peoples and all nations to come and to worship him. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Him serve with mirth, his praise foretell. Come ye before him and rejoice. Our world, our nations, our very lives belong to him.
And only when we begin to see that and acknowledge him as the king of creation, do we begin to discover life's true meaning and purpose. Because only he, the creator, can give us the security

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and the stability and the peace that as human beings we so desperately crave.
The king over all things, the king of creation. But you'll notice that this great king of creation is also secondly here, what we'll term the king of righteousness.
And that's in verses 3 through 6. We have these verses begin with the question, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?
[11:36] 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. So in these verses, the picture switches, as it were, from the kind of cosmic arena of the opening stanza to a much more intimate one of pilgrimage and worship.
The references here to the mountain or the hill of the Lord, his holy place, relate to Jerusalem, to the temple on Mount Zion. It's where the ark of the covenant that contained the law was placed in the Holy of Holies.
Those ten commandments were themselves a reflection of God's character, a declaration to his people that he was righteous and holy. And thus the hill of the Lord with its temple was the earthly symbol of God's kingship, was viewed as the place of God's special presence with his people.
And so the question is asked, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who then can draw near to this great king?
[12:57] Who can approach him? Who can come close to this holy and righteous God? And then another question is posed, and who shall stand in his holy place?

One thing, to ascend and draw near, quite another to stand. Who can remain before the presence of this holy God? Who can remain safely in his presence?
And again, the answer is given. 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.
Worshippers who would draw near to God must do so with clean hands. A pure heart, honest lips. No one can just nonchalantly amble into the presence of this great and righteous king.
Approaching God is a serious business. And that mention of clean hands is really a reference to innocent conduct or behavior.
[14:06] A blameless life. I wonder if who of us can claim that this morning. But you'll notice not simply outward actions that are highlighted here.

A pure heart is also required. This holy and blameless life must be inward as well as outward. Then we have that phrase, does not lift up his soul to what is false.
That is a description of idolatry. There can be no divided affections or loyalty. The worshiper must be wholly committed to Yahweh. And then finally, the worshiper's speech must be marked with integrity and honesty.
Lies and deceit are to have no place. So, what we have here is cleanness of hands, pureness of heart, and trueness of tongue. Many of you may be aware that the World Cup, the Football World Cup, is presently taking place in the United States of America, Canada, and Mexico.
And here in the UK, we are often reminded of England's famous World Cup final triumph of 1966. And sometimes, indeed, every time one of these championships comes along on TV, they will show a replay of that match against Germany.
[15:31] The replay of the whole match. And if you look closely at the footage of that, and I'm not suggesting that you're going to rush out and do that, but right at the end of when England won the World Cup in 1966, the captain, Bobby Moore, goes up to receive the Jules Rimet trophy from the Queen.

And if you watch the pictures, you see him preparing himself to shake hands with the Queen and to receive the trophy.
And the Queen is decked, and she's got these big long white gloves on. And as he approaches, you see him seeing that his own hands are caked in filth and mud.
And you see him desperately trying to clean his hands on his shorts before he goes to receive the trophy. He doesn't want to dirty and stain the Queen's pristine white gloves.
He wanted clean hands before approaching the monarch. Well, of course, God does not have white hands. If I can put it this way, He's white all over.

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[16:49] He's absolutely holy. Purity is essential in His presence. And so, with such conditions being set out for worshipers, we might ask ourselves, who then can come into the presence of this great King?

Who of us would dare to draw near and stand before Him? Who can receive the blessing that He offers? He will receive blessing, verse 5, from the Lord and righteousness from the God of His salvation.
The worshiper will receive the blessing of righteousness. But the question remains, who can come? Who can stand? Who can receive? Sometimes those are the kind of questions that people ask, perhaps at a communion service, communion weekend.
Who can come to the table? Who can receive the elements? Who can enjoy fellowship and communion with a holy God? And when such questions are asked, it's not uncommon for people to despair.
Perhaps rightly, after all, what one of us can claim to have? Clean hands and a pure heart and honest lips. We're all sinful human beings. Maybe you're someone who's not yet professed faith.
[18:07] Maybe you've kept your distance from the table. Conscious of your own sinful heart, you've been reluctant to draw near. But friends, what we need to see here is that what the Lord requires, He also gives.

What He demands, He also provides. He needs. Once a year on that hill, in that temple, in the Holy of Holies, on the Ark of the Covenant, the high priest would enter and sprinkle the blood of sacrifice and make atonement for the people.
And yet all of that ancient ritual and ceremony was but a prefiguring of what Jesus Christ, the true King of righteousness, would one day accomplish at Calvary's cross.
For Jesus Christ entered the temple, as it were, not by the way of shadows and types, but clothed in our very flesh and blood.
God Himself has provided a way back for sinful people, to clean hands in a pure heart and true speech, in the atoning blood of a sacrifice that covers all our sins.
[19:25] For Jesus Christ, the free church minister here in Edinburgh, I think he's buried down in the Canongate graveyard.

He wrote these words, And friends, that's good news. That's the message of the gospel.
God Himself has provided a way into His presence for those with unclean hands and impure hearts and lying lips.
At the cross of Jesus Christ, there is hope for the unclean, for the impure, for the dishonest. And the good news today is that Jesus Christ has come as our great high priest, and He has offered not the blood of an animal, but His own precious blood as a sacrifice for the sins of His people.
Charles Haddon Spurgeon writes this, And that's why the cross lies at the very first place.
[21:10] The very heart of the Christian message, the very heart of Christian worship. Through the cross, there is this great exchange, Jesus taking all my sin upon Himself, and pleased to gift me with His perfect righteousness in return.

It's the cross. It's where those with dirty hands and dirty lips and dirty hearts can be made clean.
The top lady's words, Foul I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Savior, or I die.
All for sin could not atone, Thou must save, And thou alone. The cross is where sinners are made fit for the presence of the King.
Here is where we receive righteousness from the God of our salvation, in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, a lamb without spot or blemish. He is God's gift to a sinful world.
He is God's gift to you this morning. And you'll notice how this second stanza closes with the words of verse 6, Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
[22:27] Why does the psalmist mention Jacob here? It's a puzzle sometimes to many commentators, if you know the Old Testament. Jacob was not an exemplary character.

He wasn't known for clean hands and a pure heart and an honest tongue. He was a liar. He was a cheat. He was a deceiver. And yet, perhaps there's one way in which he serves as a good example.
Back in Genesis 32, we read of his extraordinary encounter with God. And there, Jacob says to the Lord, I will not let you go unless you bless me.
He held on, we're told there, to God, as it were, for dear life. In his desperation, he wouldn't let go of God. He clung on to Him with the bloodied fingernails of faith.

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And friends, this is how we come to God, not in our own self-righteousness, not in thinking that we are good people, not proud of our own achievements or record, but in all our weakness, desperately clinging to Jesus Christ by faith alone.
[23:39] The God who is righteous is able to declare those who are unrighteous, righteous by virtue of Christ's sacrifice.

This lies at the heart of the good news. There is a righteousness from God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. The King of righteousness.
Who can come? Who can stand? Who can receive? Friends, the good news this morning is that you can. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever you've done, you can come, you can stand, and you can receive.
All because of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. All because, like Jacob of old, you've given up on yourself and you're clinging to Him with the bruised, broken fingernails of faith.
That's what it takes. Faith alone in Christ alone. The King of creation, the King of righteousness.
[24:52] Thirdly here, and quickly, the King of glory, verses 7 through 10. His great words, Lift up your heads, O gates, 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. Final stanza. I think the image changes again.
Most commentators believe that the original setting of these verses relates to the Ark of the Covenant returning to Jerusalem after some victorious military campaign.
The Ark was the symbol of, the great symbol of Yahweh's presence, often taken with them to war. And when it arrived in the city after a conquest and battle, it was as if the Lord Himself was returning in victory.
[25:53] And the picture, therefore, that the psalmist paints here is one of a returning, triumphant King in all His glory. The Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of hosts.

The God of battles. A mighty warrior being acclaimed as He makes His way into the city. The gates and ancient doors of the city are commanded to open up and to swing wide to receive this mighty King of glory.
And so, the image is one of triumph and victory and conquest. Here is the great King who has routed all His enemies and foes. And again, that imagery is employed in the New Testament to describe the work of Jesus in His life and death and resurrection and ascension.
He is the one fresh from the cross and tomb who rides through the gates of the new Jerusalem as the very King of glory. Because the suffering servant is also the King of glory.
He has triumphed over all God's enemies. Augustine writes, He overthrew the gates of mortality and flung open before Him the gates of heaven, making good His claim.
[27:07] Be glad, for I have overcome the world. Friends, Jesus Christ is the great overcomer. He is the conqueror of death who has drawn its sting.

And He is the one who brings us hope beyond the grave. He is the one who has redeemed and set His people free from sin. He is the seed of the woman who has crushed the head of the serpent.
All the great enemies of God and His people have been put, if I can put it this way, to the sword by Jesus Christ. He is taken to the field of battle as our great champion.
Sin, death, and Satan lie broken beneath His lance. He has fought on our behalf to win a mighty redemptive victory. Where others before Him, like Adam and Israel, have fallen by the wayside, He alone has conquered and triumphed.
Risen and ascended, He comes as the very King of glory. The everlasting doors open to Him. Death cannot shut its doors to Him.
[28:11] The gates of hell will never prevail. For He is the Lord, strong and mighty in battle. And so then, this great King and this mighty warrior is able to come to us in all our fears, in all our troubles, in all our sins, in all our temptations and struggles, and fight for us.

In all our weakness and frailty, He is able to draw near. He's able to stand with us. He's able to give us grace. He's able to keep us from stumbling.
He's able to present us blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy. What a comfort it is to have such a mighty King and Savior.

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And the Scriptures tell us that this King of glory will one day come again. He will return to establish an everlasting kingdom. And on that occasion, the whole world will be called upon to lift up its head and its gates and acknowledge Him as King.
The whole earth will be filled with His glory. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
[29:35] All the kingdoms of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And that day is hastening on.

But before that day arrives, before the King of glory comes, before He returns in majesty and power, we have the opportunity now to receive Him and welcome Him into our own lives.
It's not enough just to stand at a distance and admire the King's portrait. We must receive Him personally through the Holy Spirit.
He must walk off the canvas of Scripture into our lives and into our hearts. You see, when we welcome Jesus Christ into our lives, we welcome the great King of whom this psalm speaks. Greater than any earthly king or ruler. The King of creation who made us for Himself. The King of righteousness who has made a way for us.
[30:44] The King of glory in whom we become more than conquerors. Because eternal life is received only when this King takes up residence in our hearts.

It only begins when Christ is in us the hope of glory. My friends, have the gates of your own heart been lifted up to let Him in?
There is no other way to ascend the hill of the Lord. Our own hands will never suffice. But the hands that were pierced for us are clean and they cleanse us.
The heart that was broken for us is pure and it purifies us. The one who opened not His mouth now speaks as an advocate on our behalf.
Behold your God. Behold the great King. Fling wide the gates of your heart and welcome Him into your life this morning.
[31:57] Bow the knee to King Jesus and confess Him as Lord and Savior. The King of creation. God our Father we are creatures created beings and yet by faith we can be united to the one who is the creator.

We are sinners unclean stained and dirty and yet by faith we can be united to the one who is the king of righteousness. righteousness.
We are often defeated and cast down and yet by faith we can be united to the one who is the king of glory. Lord work in us what is pleasing in your sight.
By your Holy Spirit help us to welcome this king into our lives that he may reign and rule there now and always.
Amen. Amen.

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