

Given that this is my last sermon at Michiana for four months
I wanted to leave you with the most important thing.

And the most important thing for you is to see Jesus.
When we come together to worship the triune God,
you need to see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Some churches have done this through building great and fantastic buildings.
And I'm not sure that such things are entirely bad.

But as we look at Psalm 24 tonight,
you will hopefully see Jesus in your midst.
I'm going to ask you at the end of sermon whether you have figured out
where you are in this text.

The key word to Psalm 24 is the word “lift.”
There is an upward movement to the whole Psalm
with its rising images of ascending and lifting.

You can see it clearly in verse 4
““he who does lift up his soul to what is false”
and of course the refrain in verses 7 and 9
uses the verb four times:
“Lift up your heads, O gates,
and be lifted up, O ancient doors.”

But there is one more usage – in verse 5.
“He will receive blessing from the LORD” –
actually reads, “he will lift up blessings from the LORD.”

This is the word used to speak of how Pharaoh would “lift up the heads”
of the cupbearer and baker in Genesis 40.
It has a wide range of meanings,
and so it is rightly translated “he will receive” –
but there are other ways of saying “he will receive” –
and so this particular usage calls attention to the connection
between the one who does not lift up his soul to what is false,
and the one who will lift up blessings from the LORD.

This verb is also used in the third commandment:
“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”
Literally, “You shall not lift up the name of the LORD your God in vain.”

The whole point of the Psalm is focused on getting from earth to heaven –
from the problem of the lack of pure hearts
to the ascent of the King of Glory into the holy place.

1. “The Earth Is the LORD’s”: Belonging to God (24:1-2)

*24:1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, [and all that fills it]
the world and those who dwell therein,*

2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

In order to understand what Psalm 24 is doing here,
you need to see the picture of the world that lies in back of this Psalm.

When we hear “the earth is the Lord’s”
we tend to think in terms of “planet earth,”
but when an Israelite heard, “ha-aretz”
he remembered how God created the three realms:

the heavens, the earth, and the seas.

The earth does not refer to a “planet”
but to the dry land.
(Genesis 1:10 – God called the dry land “earth” and the waters he called “seas”)

And you see this same worldview in play in verse 2 –
that God has founded the earth upon the seas.

Genesis portrays a three-story universe:
the heavens above
the earth beneath
and the waters under the earth.

The assertion in Psalm 24 is not saying that the “planet” belongs to God.
Rather, Psalm 24 is making a particular claim:
the dry land – the world – the place where humans dwell –
belongs to Yahweh.

Throughout Genesis 1-2 there is a strong emphasis on the “earth”
as belonging to God – responding to God – submitting to God.

And then in the Flood, God drowns the earth (the dry land) –
as the word “aretz” is used 49 times during the flood narrative!

But the “earth” also refers to the nations:
in Genesis 10 “aretz” refers to the particular lands of the nations.

So aretz can speak of the whole of the dry land –
or any particular part of the dry land that belongs to a particular nation.

In Genesis 12:1 God says to Abraham,
go forth from your father’s house, and go to the *eretz* that I will show you.

Go to the “earth” – the particular piece of dry land – that I will give you.

And every time that you hear about the “land of Canaan” in Genesis,
it is the “ha-aretz” of Canaan.

The Promised Land is the promised “eretz.”
In the beginning God created the heavens and the eretz.
And God promised to Abraham an “eretz.”

Do you see why Paul says that God told Abraham that he would be heir of the whole earth?
Because from the start there was an intentional connection
between the “land” and the “earth” (namely, it’s the same word!!).

At the end of Genesis Joseph tells his brothers –
take me out of this eretz (Egypt)
to the eretz that God promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

The word “eretz” is used 176 times in the Psalms.
Sometimes as “earth” and sometimes as “land” –
the reason why we know to translate it “earth” here
is because of its parallel “world” in the second line,
and because of the creation idea in the second verse.

Because while the first phrase emphasizes Yahweh’s rule over all that “fills” the earth –
throughout the Psalms this word is used to speak of God’s rule
over the whole of creation –
but the second phrase focuses especially on man:
The world-dwellers of Psalm 24:1 belong to God.

But of course, verse 2 sounds a bit odd:
he has founded it upon the seas makes sense from an ancient perspective
(after all, the seas are the lower storey of the universe –
think of Psalm 136:6 – “who spread out the earth upon the waters”),
but no one in the ancient world believed that the land was built upon rivers!

Everyone knew that rivers flowed over the earth!

So what's going on?

Remember Genesis 2?

There were four rivers in Genesis 2.

These rivers water the whole earth.

Think of subterranean fountains bubbling up from below.

The existence of subterranean rivers that sometimes burst forth from below

would tend to support the ancient notion that the earth is founded upon rivers.

So the effect of the first part of Psalm 24 is to convince us that all the inhabitants of the earth belong to God.

But the fact that everyone belongs to God only heightens our discomfort with reality.

Because while everyone belongs to God,

who can ascend to the LORD?

2. "Who Shall Ascend?" Seeking the Face of God (24:3-6)

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

4 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.

5 He will receive blessing from the LORD

and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

If verses 1-2 focus upon the earth and how the earth is founded upon the seas,
verse 3 turns our eyes upwards.

While ostensibly the "hill of the LORD" is on earth,

the earthly Jerusalem – the earthly sanctuary –

was designed as a picture of God's heavenly dwelling place.

Standing in the holy place was considered standing before God –

coming into the presence of the LORD.

But the focus here is upon the one who may ascend the hill of the LORD.

Notice the very *singular* emphasis here.

Some have speculated regarding how this Psalm was used.

Some have suggested that it could have been used for the enthronement of the king.

Others have claimed that it was used for an annual 'enthronement' ceremony

where the ark of the covenant was brought out

and then taken back into the holy of holies.

But such speculations are not especially useful.

The *point* of the Psalm is that there is only one who can enter the 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.*

The image here is of a holy place beleaguered by the unholy.
Think of the kings of Judah – some of whom were pretty good –
but invariably their sons did not walk in their ways,
and the blessing of the LORD that was promised to the pure of heart
was always elusive – always just around the corner –
when the next king comes – the next Son of David.

But the everyday reality fell far short of this!

David Clines has raised a good question here:

“If the world contains relatively small pockets of holiness,
like a hill of the Lord or a temple, surrounded by vast areas of unholiness,
like (presumably) everywhere else,
and if the unholy has the power to contaminate the holy
but the holy does not have the power to infect the unholy,
what future, I ask myself, is there for the holy?

The holy is rather under threat, is it not,
if it has to be protected from the unholy by the exclusion of unrighteous people
from visiting the sanctuary.

For if impure people are supposed to be kept out of the shrine, or keep themselves out,
in order to protect its holiness,
what happens if impure people are inadvertently allowed in?

Does the holy thereby become unholy?” (David J. A. Clines, 3)

This is, in one sense, the fundamental question of the Old Testament.

If the vast majority of people are unclean –
and the unclean contaminates the holy –
then the holy will never survive.

Indeed, this is the marvelous message of the gospel that comes to us in Jesus Christ.
Because the holiness of Jesus is such that it decontaminates the unclean.
When Jesus touches lepers, he does not become unclean,
they become clean!
His is the holiness that Psalm 24 longs for!
A holiness that *cannot* be contaminated!

And this is why understanding verse six is so important:

*6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah*

(literally, this generation is seeking him,
they are seeking your face, O Jacob)

This is seen as such a strange statement
that most interpreters follow the Septuagint,
“who seek the face of the God of Jacob.”

But what would it mean to seek the face of Jacob?
We saw in Genesis that Jacob was said to be “a blameless man.” (25:27)
While most modern commentators don’t agree,
that doesn’t change what the text says!!
(And most ancient commentators had no difficulty seeing that Jacob was blameless!)

But if you think of Jacob as a blameless man –
and you are talking about one who turns away from idolatry
and does not swear deceitfully,
you could be describing Jacob!

In other words, this generation is seeking the one like Jacob.

And when this one comes –
he will receive blessing from Yahweh and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

When the king comes, the blessing of Jacob will come.
Remember the blessing of Jacob upon his sons?
Jacob had spoken of how the scepter would not depart from Judah
until the one came to whom it belonged.

So maybe Psalm 24 was sung for every new son of David who ascended the throne:
(will this be the one?)

Or maybe it was sung to symbolize the ascension of God to his throne
(which would only heighten the disjunction between the holiness of God
and the uncleanness of everyone else!).

The point is the same:

When this blameless man comes –
when the one with clean hands and pure heart comes –
then *he* will lift up (or receive) blessing from Yahweh
he will lift up (or receive) righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is what Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:16 regarding the mystery of godliness:
“He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”

The resurrection of Jesus was his *vindication* – his justification –
it was when Jesus was declared righteous.

Of course, the difference between Christ’s justification and ours
is that Christ was declared righteous because he *was* righteous!
Whereas we are declared righteous not because *we* are righteous,
but because *he* is righteous,
and his righteousness is imputed to us!

So the second section of Psalm 24 shows us our need for the *one* whose hands are clean –
the one who receives blessing and righteousness from God.

You might think that this is the end of the story!
What more do we need?
Well, it is not enough for Jesus to be righteous!
It is not enough for *him* to enter the holy place.
After all, where does that leave us?

There is a further problem here.
We have seen that the earth – the *eretz* belongs to God –
and yet these things and people that belong to God
are not holy –
they are not able to come up and ascend into his holy place.

And so the further problem is that at least some of these people who belong to God
are not just unclean –
they are his enemies who must be conquered –
that is plainly seen in the third stanza,
which speaks of how the King of Glory must conquer his enemies in battle.

3. “Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!” Seeing the Coming of the King of Glory (24:7-10)

7 Lift up your heads, O gates!

And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

8 Who is this King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

This morning we saw this use of “mighty man” or “warrior” used of the blessed man.
Now we see that the King of glory is a warrior – a “gibor” –
he is a “mighty man.”

This language often makes modern people uncomfortable.
We don’t like thinking of God as a warrior – as a mighty man.
And we don’t like thinking of the triumph of God in such crassly physical terms.

But Psalm 24 calls us to see our King of glory as the strong and mighty one.
He is the one who goes out to battle against all his and our foes,
and he is the one who wins the battle!

Our Shorter Catechism asks, “how does Christ execute the office of a king?”

The first part of the answer is:

“Christ executes the office of a king by subduing us to himself.”

How often do you think of Christ’s rule in your life?

Do you think of Christ as the mighty warrior who comes and subdues *you!*

We are more used to the rest:

“in ruling and defending us,
and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”

But we usually think of Christ’s conquering in bland “spiritual” terms.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is KING!

And as the King of Glory,

Jesus rules over the nations of the earth.

His sway is spiritual –

if you mean by that, that he rules by his Spirit –

but please do not confuse “church authority” with “Christ’s authority”!

Our weapon is the Sword of the Spirit – which is the word of God.

All church power is ministerial and declarative.

And it is true that Christ’s only weapon is his word.

But the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword –

and when the word of God is wielded by the one who *is* the Word made flesh,
then when King Jesus speaks – it happens.

Flip over to Psalm 29:4-5

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

When the voice of the LORD speaks, all the earth trembles before him.

And so when King Jesus speaks,

his word can literally overthrow kingdoms,

strike people dead on the spot,

and bring destruction on the earth!

Verses 9-10 then echo verses 7-8,

9 Lift up your heads, O gates!

And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

10 Who is this King of glory?

The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah

The difference between verses 7-8 and 9-10 is slight.

In verse 7 the ancient doors are to “be lifted up”

while in verse 9 the ancient doors now are to do the lifting.

And in verse 8 the discussion of the King of Glory

focuses on the might and prowess of Yahweh in battle,

whereas in verse 10 the focus is on the *person* of Yahweh of Hosts.

What comes to the fore very clearly, then,

is that humanity’s only hope –

Israel’s only hope –

is if Yahweh himself comes as the King of glory

who will fulfill all that was promised to Jacob.

Now, this phrase “the king of glory” is almost unique here.

nowhere else in the OT do you find the title “king of glory.”

The only place where you get a similar phrase is in 1 Corinthians 2,

where Paul speaks of Christ as the “Lord of glory.”

When Paul says that “Jesus is Lord” he is affirming the Kingship of Christ.

So when Paul speaks of the “Lord of glory”

he is at the very least alluding to Psalm 24.

Paul is saying that Jesus has come as the conquering King of glory –

and his conquest has come about through a most unusual victory:

the crucifixion of the king.

Because it was only when the King of Glory took upon himself the uncleanness of his people

that his holiness could “decontaminate” them.

And so *we* sing Psalm 24 as those who sing the glory of the triumphant king

as he ascends to the right hand of the Father.

For us there is a definite moment in the liturgy of heaven when this song is sung:

it is virtually identical in content to Revelation 5,

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may enter his holy place?

Only the conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah –

only the Lamb who was slain –

he is the King of glory who ascends in glorious triumph
to the throne of God.

He is the King of Glory!

Have you figured out where you are in Psalm 24?

Sure – you are found in verse one.

You are one “those who dwell” in the world.

You are one who belongs to God.

That is important.

You are *not* the “one who has clean hands and pure heart” –
at least not in yourself.

But in Christ that can truly be said of you.

And certainly it is supposed to be true of you more and more each day.

But there is one more place where you are found in Psalm 24.

And this is the most important place.

*Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

You are the temple where Christ dwells.

You are the dwelling place of the Lord of glory.

(And do not think for a moment that this means that you have the option
of *not* lifting up your heads!)

When the King of glory comes, the gates of his holy temple *will* open –

When the King of glory comes,

his temple rejoices at his approach and so throws wide the gates
to welcome the conquering King of glory.

And even this night,

we meet with the triumphant King of glory.

Even this night we behold the coming of the King

as he rides in victory to his temple!

Because of the holiness of the King –

because *he* has lifted up blessing from the LORD

and righteousness from the God of his salvation,

therefore you are being built into that holy place –

as living stones into a suitable dwelling place for the LORD!