

# Psalms 24

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Turn to Psalm 24. There's a poem called Psychoid. As I was going up the stair, I met a man who wasn't there.

! He wasn't there again today. I wish, I wish he'd go away. Now I think that sums up many people's attitude towards God. When it comes to God, we're a little bit ambivalent.

Most of the time, we want him there, but a lot of times we don't want him there. Sartre, the philosopher, said that God does not exist, I cannot deny.

But my whole being cries out, for God I cannot forget. It's a strange thing for an atheist to say. It's a lovely humorous little story about Khrushchev, the communist leader, the Soviet leader.

The Chinese communists, they hated Khrushchev. And they called Khrushchev a Bible-quoting clown. And he didn't mind being called a clown, but he hated being called a Bible-quoting clown.

[ 1 : 04 ] So he called a press conference, and at the press conference, he announced to the world's press, this is the Russian leader, I want to assure you that I am an atheist. An Englishman said, well you do talk a lot about the Almighty for an atheist, sir.

To which he replied, do I have to tell you twice, I am the chairman of the council of the Soviet ministers of the Soviet Union, and I am an atheist. A Frenchman piped up and said, how do we know you are not a secret believer?

Khrushchev exploded into the microphone and said, will you listen to me? God knows I am an atheist. Now we are a little bit affluent, aren't we, when it comes to God. We want him to be there, and we don't want him to be there.

And this psalm explains to you why you are like that. There are three very obvious sections. In verses 1 and 2, what you have got is a creation psalm. So the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and all those who dwell in it.

For he has founded it upon the sea, and he has established it upon the rivers. It's a great psalm of creation. Verse 3 to 6 is a psalm of wisdom. It's a kind of morality psalm. It explains to you what does it mean to be righteous, what does it mean to be in relationship with God.

[ 2 : 11 ] And for that it says somebody who's got to have clean hands and a pure heart. And then all of a sudden, 7 to 10, you have a fanfare of trumpets, and you're in a messianic psalm.

That's looking forward to a saviour, to a messiah. A royal psalm. So what is it? Creation? Is it a creation psalm? Is it a wisdom psalm?

Or is it a messianic psalm? Well, the answer is yes, to all three. And so verses 1 to 2, we're introduced to God who made you. God who made us.

And what you have to see here, if you look at the two verses, you'll see it's God's ownership claim on us. And again, you'll notice that LORD is in capital letters.

LORD is in capital letters. When I sign your passport, when I sign a reference, I sign it as Reverend A. Paul Levy. That's my title.

[ 3 : 11 ] I don't like to use it. I don't like you to call me pastor or reverend. I don't particularly like that. But formally, that is my title. Imagine you came to my home for supper and Claire called me reverend all evening.

It would be very odd, wouldn't it? Very weird. Reverend is the title of clergyman. Paul is my name. And when you see the name LORD, I want you to realise, it's not the title of God, it's his name.

Yahweh. So whenever you see LORD in capital letters, that is his name. That is his name that he revealed to Moses in the burning bush. It's the name Yahweh. It's not his title. And when it says the earth is for the Lord, it's not saying, I believe in creation.

It's saying much more than that. It's saying that this world belongs to God. But it's saying much more than that. It's saying this world belongs to the God of Israel.

This world belongs to the God who has entered into covenant relationship with his people. This God, who is unknowable, who you can't know, has made himself known to you. And it is telling us here that God, that Yahweh, is the God of the Bible, not just God.

[ 4 : 32 ] Lots of people believe in God. People think we all believe in the same God. But what you've got to see, when you see that word LORD, L-O-R-T in capital letters in the Bible, it's saying this is the God of relationship.

This is the God who is. This is the God of the Bible. The God who reveals himself. The God who enters into a relationship with his people. The earth belongs to him.

He is its owner. And what this psalm is saying is not simply that God is the creator, but it's about ownership. Do you notice that the focus is on the inhabited earth.

Can you just see that? It's not just the moon and the stars and the mountains and the sea, but it's the inhabited earth. Everything is Yahweh's. And all who live in it.

It's not just simply about creating. It's about ownership. And what we're being told right at the outside is whatever culture you come from, and whatever language you speak, and whatever religion you practice or don't practice, you and I belong to Yahweh.

[ 5 : 39 ] We belong to the God of Israel. You and I, who are the inhabitants of planet earth, right at the beginning, it is saying, listen, you belong to God.

He has you by right of creation. You are not your own. You are owned by God. And you say, I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God.

It makes no difference. Because God owns you. It's a bit like Peter Pan and Ticker Bell. And Captain Hook.

Do you know that story, children? Peter Pan and Ticker Bell and Captain Hook. What happens if you know that story? When you say, I don't believe in angels, what are fairies?

I don't believe in fairies. What happens? Do you know? Do you know that story? It's a good story. I'll tell you what happens. So we used to play in the playground, isn't it? You'd run around the playground and you would say, I don't believe in fairies.

[ 6 : 36 ] I don't believe in fairies. Because every time you say you don't believe in fairies, a fairy dies in Peter Pan. Girls would go nuts. Do you remember the story? And so those who loved fairies and Ticker Bell, they got terribly upset.

And you say, I don't believe in fairies. That's okay. But you can't say, I don't believe in God and expect him to disappear. You can't treat God like Tinker Bell. God doesn't just go away because you say you don't believe in him.

The very breath that you use to say, I don't believe in God, has actually been given to you by God. And in a strange paradoxical way, the very capacity that you have to formulate the statement, I don't believe in God, actually declares the greatness of God.

Even as you say, I don't believe in God, you're declaring his praise because you are fearfully and wonderfully made. And you may be talking trouble rubbish.

But the very fact that you're able to talk at all is to what pertains glory and praise. So to say, I don't believe in God, doesn't make him go away. It's like the little child, isn't it, playing hide and seek.

[ 7 : 55 ] And because the little child has got her hands over her eyes, she thinks you've gone away. It's just silly. You can't treat God in that way. You can't treat the police in that way.

I've said that before, isn't it? You know, you drive down the 840, the police pull you over for speeding, and the traffic policeman walks up to your window and you wind it down and say, I'm sorry, I don't believe in policemen. I don't believe in traffic cops.

He won't go away, will he? Traffic cops are not fairies. He's standing down by your window, isn't he? Taking down your details, demanding your license, whether or not you believe in him or not.

And so whether you believe in the God of the Bible tonight or not is besides the point. Because whether you believe in God or not doesn't make him go away. And so the first part of this psalm is to bring before us this fundamental relationship which is more profound than any other relationship you can ever have.

And relationships, we know, that's what life is all about, isn't it? That's relationships. And we know that if relationships go wrong in our life, everything gets out of culture. If the relationship in the kind of domestic circle with our loved ones gets out of joy, we know life goes wrong.

[ 9 : 08 ] But here is the fundamental relationship with God. Think, for example, in your workplace where you work, there's always someone in charge, isn't there? Whether you're in industry or in

office, whoever it is, there's always someone in charge.

Do you remember what it's like, isn't it, when you're in school and the teacher puts someone in charge? I'm going out of the room and they elevated this one person above all the rest and put them in charge and they became utterly unbearable and unsufferable.

And didn't they know it? They were in charge. And if you wanted to thrive in that class environment while your teacher was out in the room, you had to stay on the right side of that person who'd been put in charge.

And so what is your relationship like with the God who made you? He's in charge of everything, not just the classroom. He's in charge of absolutely everything. And this is what this psalm is telling us. The earth is the Lord's and it is Yahweh's, the world and all those who dwell in it.

So what kind of relationship do you have with this Lord? Is it positive? Because if you have a relationship with Him that is right, well, that will flow out from that.

[10:25] And yes, we live in a stressful world, but you will find your relationships get put right. But if your relationship with Him is wrong, well, everything will end up being wrong. That is the nature of sin. Sin is to live in God's world without any reference to the God who made you.

It's to say to Him, Lord, you are not boss. I am boss. I'm my own boss. So right at the very beginning, we are faced with this challenge, this fundamental relationship of God's ownership claim on you.

You are not your own tonight. God has made you. The earth is the Lord's and everything is in it. Now the second part of the psalm, we go from God's staking His ownership claim, verse 1 and 2, verses 3 and 6, it changes to the hail of the Lord.

It's really interesting. So do you remember, the earth is the Lord's, all of the earth is His, and then there's hail of the Lord. It's very interesting.

This marvelous God who made the universe, this creation, just imagine what the creator is like, who created the beauty of this world, He made it all, and He is the one who has revealed Himself at the burning bush, the covenant Lord, as one who wants to enter into a relationship with His people.

[11:39] And this marvelous God who has made all that there is, wants to know you tonight. And He wants you to know Him. And He says, there's a place where you can go, where we can meet.

There's a rendezvous. He's appointed a place for you to meet with us. And in verse 3, can you see it? It's the hill of the Lord.

It's His place. His holy place. In Old Testament terms, that is the hill in the city of Jerusalem, where He has made Himself known.

He's saying here, in this passage, that's my address, that's where the people of God in that time could go to meet with Him. That's where God had chosen to hang out, if I can dare put it like that way.

That's where God has made Himself available to meet with people. The owner of all, to whom we all belong, has arranged a place, where you can be with Him.

[12:39] That's what the Psalms are always calling on us to do, isn't it? It says, in Psalm 100, all people that on earth do dwell, come to the Lord with a cheerful voice. Everybody on earth is invited.

In the prophets, Isaiah 2, Isaiah speaks of the day when all nations will come to God's holy hill. So this God, who's in a relationship, in covenant with Israel, it's not meant to be a kind of privatised Jewish sort of thing.

It's for all the world. There's a global aspect to this. Salvation is of the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, isn't it? God brings His salvation through His people, Israel.

But it's for the whole world. And God's intention was always that, that all the people that on earth do dwell should come to the Lord with cheerful voice.

So this God, who owns you and made you, actually wants to know you. And for you to know Him. And that's what this Psalm is telling us.

[13:37] And He's made a place for us to meet. And He says, come up to my holy hill. Come to my place. And He really wants you tonight to make that journey. And it's really worth making that journey because look at verse 5.

The person who goes there will receive blessing from the Lord, good things, and righteousness from God, His Saviour. So to come to God's holy place, to go to God's holy hill is to receive blessing and to be vindicated, to be declared, we are in the right.

It's to be saved according to verse 5. That's what it means. But there's a question, isn't it? And it's a pretty obvious question. How can I be declared right with the God who made me when I know I'm wrong?

And that's the question in verses 3 to 6. So there's a question there. It's a question there. Who will ascend? Who will go up to the hill of the Lord? Who will stand in His holy place?

And apparently, not everyone can do it. There are requirements. You can't just waltz into this God's presence. You can't go through life thinking it'll be alright on the night.

[14:50] When I meet with Him, you know, it'll be okay. It's His business to forgive. That's His job. You don't just expect to turn up. No, according to this son, there are requirements.

So can you see what it says? It says the holy place. Who's going to go up? And it says very forward, doesn't it?

He who's got clean hands and a pure heart. So there you have it. It's really intriguing, isn't it? God invites you to come and meet with Him. The God who made you. He arranges the place.

Let's meet this place. But on the other hand, there's this depressing impossibility that because you and I don't have clean hands and our hearts are not pure, we cannot go up to the hill of the Lord.

We cannot stand in the holy place. Because there must be outward, clean hands and inward pure heart purity. And if you're willing to be honest with yourself tonight, you will know that is a brilliant description because we know, don't we, that we've not got clean hands and a pure heart.

[16:02] In the second half of verse 4, he elaborates on it a bit. He says, who's going to be able to climb up this hill and stand in God's holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Who did not lift up his soul to vanity?

To what is false? Lord, he swear to what is false. To lift up your soul is really to worship. It's just another way of talking about idolatry.

And idolatry is essentially to look for blessing which only God can give you, but to look to a false God. God cannot have, he cannot have people coming up his hill looking for blessing from some other source.

And yet, that's what we do. That's what Israel did, didn't they? When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after receiving the commandments of God, what did he find? He found that the Israelites, they were still worshipping Yahweh but they made that golden calf.

It wasn't that they were worshipping another God but they were still coming up the holy hill so they thought but they were looking elsewhere for blessing.

[17:18] Someone I knew in South Wales who said when something went wrong in her life how can God do this to me? I've taught Sunday school all my life. I said that's what she was doing.

She was coming up God's holy hill and yet she was looking to herself look what I've done that's what she thought deserved blessing. She looked to herself to vindicate herself and when we do that we're guilty of idolatry.

Paul tells us in Romans 3 that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's what sin means. It means to fall short of God and God has shown us his glory in Christ the glory of God is seen in Jesus Christ and Christ embodies the glory of God.

And Christ embodies the requirements of God's law and we've fallen short of that. In fact you and I have even fallen short of our own standards and me. So if I was to pull the screen down and I was to put a projector of all your thoughts and all your words and everything you've ever said and I was to be able to beam those onto that screen there it would not be very long would it until you ran out the door and so would I.

Because we don't live up to our own standards. I don't want people to know what I'm really like and you don't want people to know what you're really like. Once I was sorry I was my mates in Cardiff when I was in university they came they'll tell you this in fact my best man quotes this in every sermon he preaches that once he knocked on my door when I was in the house that I lived and I didn't answer the door because there was music playing and he came round to the side of the door side of the room and he and my other mates were able to see me dancing and singing in front of the mirror posing and it couldn't have been more humiliating and even now when they talk to me about it I go bright red and feel awful I think well they say it was

[19:37] Tina Turner simply the best it wasn't that but it makes for a better sermon illustration but it was horrific because I was suddenly exposed to what I was it was so humiliating because we know we're full of ego our hearts are not clean our hearts are not pure and I think Psalm 24 it's so frustrating when you really get it because it reminds you that I belong to God and there's nothing

more important than that there's nothing more desirable than that you want that you want to be known by God and God wants you to know him he's set a place for you to meet he is your maker and he invites you to come into his presence there's a place you can go and God says come come come come to my holy hill and you say good let's go where is it it's the temple in Jerusalem let's go up to the holy hill and then you find out you can't get in you're disqualified outside and in I've put my hope in other gods I've lived selfishly and deceitfully and I'm all ego I've lived a lie and I don't want to know that and God knows what

I'm like and I can't get in the one place in the universe that I really need to be is closed to me when I shut out from the presence of the God who made us the gates of the holy city they are shut the doors that guard that holy place they are locked and they are barred and there is to be no coming in for me there's to be no blessing for me there's to be no saving for me I'm out in the cold with my sin and my adultery and it's in that very moment of tragic realisation that you hear another sound and here's the third part of the psalm you hear the sound of trumpets and verse seven tells you that there is a king that is coming and verse seven says lift up your heads and be lifted up ancient doors that the king of glory make him in who is this king glory it's the lord strong and mighty the lord mighty lift up your heads lift them up you ancient doors that the king of glory make him in who is this king of glory the lord of host he is the king of glory it's a fan pair of trumpets and the king is on his way it's a really strange image isn't it look at verse seven it's an image of gates that are depressed I've never met a gate that's depressed but that's the image the gates they are downcast they've been shut for such a long time and you've got the image of a holy city a holy hill a holy place and outside of that city and those gates the whole of the human race sense and it's not one person there's not one single person that can get in no one's got clean hands and a pure heart and the gates are depressed they are rusted on their hinges they're overgrown with ivy people have given up hope of those gates ever swinging open you've never seen a more miserable gate in all your life and then you hear the sound of trumpets and there's a procession and it's the king and then you hear this sound you hear the gates begin to open and the king comes and the gates open fully and the king comes in the question of everyone's lips is who is this king of glory who is this person that can come into god's holy place who is this person that can come into god's holy hill how can he come in how can he enter when I can't why do the gates swing open for him what qualifies him to go into the holy place and you can answer that in a number of different ways psalm answers it in two ways who is the king of glory it says the psalm it is the lord isn't it it's the same lord as this one it's the lord of hosts well of course he can come in because it's his city it's his place and of course the gates will swing open him because he owns it while we sit outside miserable and messed up and disqualified because of our sin but you notice it's not simply that being the lord qualifies him to come in because it's a specific kind of parade that's described for us it's a victory parade Yahweh is not simply returning home but can you see it he's returning home from battle verse 8 the king is coming back from war he's gone to fight a battle and now he comes back fresh from his victory and the gates swing open it's not just who he is that gives him the right of entry but what he's done he's gone out to fight and then he comes back victorious it's victory day and everybody in the street joins the celebration the war has been won it's ticketing parade do you see the picture who's this king of glory this is the Christ this is God's king but this isn't David and this isn't Solomon this is Jesus the Christ he's left his holy place he's left his holy city in heaven to come into the sinful world that is Jesus has come into this world as it were to go outside the city to go outside the gates there was a green hill far away outside the city wall where our dear Lord was crucified who died to save us all that's the picture and he fought a costly battle who is the king of glory who is this one with clean hands and a pure heart well they took those clean hands and they nailed him to the cross that's who it is who is this king of glory who owns us and who allowed himself to be taken by us and placed on a cross outside of the city wall he's fought a costly battle but he's won and now he's returning in triumph and for him the rusty hinges swing open and the crowds swing into the procession behind him and they march and they dance in the presence of the holy god it's a great picture of salvation what does it mean to be saved well in terms of this psalm it's to be a creature of god banished from his presence outside of his place with no means of going in whatsoever and you don't even actually want the doors to open you're quite happy outside and then all of a sudden Jesus comes and there's a burst of trumpets and up the hill comes the king the Christ and the doors open and to be a Christian is really to line up behind Jesus because you recognize that it's only because of him that you can get in it's only because of his victory that you

can stand in the holy place and the gates were shut up against us but now they open to him and in him and in his procession you go in so let me ask you have you done that let me give you the way of salvation in three sentences the way to become a christian the way to come to know the god who made you who owns you and receive blessing and vindication from him is this number one recognize you're locked out you willing to do that tonight it's quite difficult in a city like ours to recognize actually

[ 27:10 ] I'm locked out number two to see the doors swing open for jesus that he is the only one who can enter and number three to swing into line behind him it's very simple if you can forget everything else I say just keep that in your mind you're locked out the doors open for jesus swing into line behind him can you recognize the bad news that you're shut out from his presence but you see the doors swing open for him you look at the cross and the resurrection and you understand what that means that Jesus laid down his perfect life in death as a sacrifice for your sins so that the doors might swing open so have you swung into line behind him have you recognized your greatest need is to know your creator have you realized that you're shut out because of your unclean hands and impure heart the gates are locked and the only way in is through jesus christ i am the door he says his name means god's anointed the king of glory really jesus christ it's not his surname it's not like paul levy to be a christian really you need to recognize that jesus of nazareth that man is in fact the king he is in fact the christ he is the one who is able to put you right with god and if you are convinced of that you are a christian if you can say jesus is the christ and i follow him you are in christ you are following him who is this king of glory the lord strong and mighty the lord mighty in battle and so to be shut out is a terrible thing isn't it have you ever had that experience of being locked out it's very frustrating isn't it i went through a period of forgetting my keys all the time it's so frustrating isn't it you curse the other people in the house under your breath so annoying to be shut out but what is that to be compared to to be shut out forever from the only relationship in the end that matters and that is to be related to the god who made you that's what the bible talks about out of darkness being banished being shut out from knowing god that is what we call hell and it's so secret that jesus won the battle it's so secret that jesus has opened the doors and so as christians we need to brag about it don't we we've got a great message of victory that jesus won you are shut out jesus is the only one who the doors open to swing into line behind him who is this king of glory the lord strong and mighty the lord mighty in battle he is the king of glory we're going to sing this