

Psalm 24

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Preacher: Andrew Kueh

[0:00] Psalm 24, that's on page 458. And we're going to look at this just one-off psalm today.

And I want to do this because this psalm asks a really important question. It may not be a question you have thought of. It may not be a question you've ever asked.

But this question matters to all of us here. It's a question I want all of us here today to ask. It's there in verse 3. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place? This verse is asking the all-important question, who can stand in the direct presence of the living God and survive?

And not only survive, but who can stand? Who can come into God's presence and rightfully, deservedly be there? And this isn't an irrelevant philosophical question to ask.

[1:03] No, this question matters to everyone here because one day, we will all be brought into the presence of the living God. And that isn't optional.

That is inevitable. And on that day, you can either stand and survive and rightfully be there, or you cannot stand but fall.

And so this psalm asks the all-important question, who shall stand in God's holy place? Who has the right to be in the presence of the living God?

And this question exists in the first place because of who God is. We have to ask this question because of God's character, because God is great.

And his greatness makes a difference to our life. God's greatness means that not everyone can come into his presence and stand.

[2:05] No, God's greatness means we must approach him with great caution. And that's where this psalm begins, by looking at God's greatness.

And this is the first thing I want us to see today, just two points today. The first is this. God's greatness should give us great caution. God's greatness should give us great caution.

Some books have great opening lines, don't they? Let's see if you recognize this one. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

Tale of two cities. Well done, well done. Well, I think this could be one of the best opening lines of any psalm. First one. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

The world and those who dwell therein. And this is such a powerful opening line because it states just something so clear and definitive about God, doesn't it?

[3:06] The earth belongs to God. And everything in it, the fullness thereof, everything that fills creation belongs to God.

Think of what that includes. From the clouds in the atmosphere down to the earth's iron core, it all belongs to God. He's the owner.

From the beetles to the birds, from the mountains in Mongolia to the mud in your garden, it is all the Lord's. The breath in your lungs right now, it has an owner.

Remember, the limestone bricks upholding the Palace of Westminster, they ultimately don't belong to King Charles or Parliament. No, they belong to the Lord.

And why? Because he made it all, verse 2. For because he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

[4:07] The earth isn't just a bit of space dust that happens to be floating in this galaxy. No, the earth is someone's precious possession.

Someone's intricate creation. It is the Lord's. And everything in it. And that includes us, did you see? The world and those who dwell therein.

This opening line shatters everything that we've been led to believe, doesn't it? We so easily hear, we so easily tell ourselves, my life is my own.

I'm crafting my own destiny. My life, my choice. It doesn't hurt anyone else, so I can do what I like. But all that assumes the earth isn't anyone's.

But no, the earth is the Lord's. And all of us who dwell in it. And when something belongs to someone, it involves a responsibility.

[5 : 12] Think of Wrexham Football Club. You might have been watching the documentary about Wrexham Football Club. Remember, the club got bought by those two actors, Ryan Reynolds and Rob Mack. They own Wrexham.

They're the owners. Which means the players and the manager and the staff, they all have a responsibility to the owners. They exist in a relationship with the owners.

There is an accountability. The players can't just do what they like. The manager can't just take the club in any direction he chooses. The staff can't just run wild because they have an owner.

Well, we have an owner. And that means we exist in a relationship with him. Whether we recognize it or not, whether we like it or not, every single one of us has a responsibility and accountability to the living God.

And that doesn't just mean our Sundays. And it's not just the aspect of our lives that people can see. But every single aspect of our lives, our thoughts, our careers, our parenting, our relationships, our schoolwork, the fullness of our lives has a responsibility toward God.

[6 : 34] As soon as you realize this isn't just space dust we're on, this is someone's creation, it changes everything for you. We live our lives before a great and mighty creator.

There is a powerful majesty over this whole world. And so to come into the presence of that creator, to be in the presence of the Lord of all, that is not a small thing.

We do not simply just have the right to stand before him. It's always the case, the greater the person, the harder it is to get access to them, isn't it?

So think of getting into Oxford or Cambridge. You can't just go to those universities. A very high standard is required because of its greatness.

Well, think about Windsor Castle. Maybe you visited Windsor Castle. You can't just stroll into the king's chamber, can you? No, there are checks and barriers and security.

[7 : 43] We don't simply have the right to just stroll in. There is a very, very high standard required to enter into his presence. Because of his greatness, he's the king.

Well, how much harder is it to stand before the great Lord of all, whose holiness is like a consuming fire, whose majesty is unrivaled, whose purity is blinding.

God's greatness should give us great caution. It is not a small thing to enter into his presence.

Which is exactly why this psalm immediately asked the question, verse 3, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place? Now, the hill of the Lord refers to God's direct presence here on earth.

So God is present everywhere. So kids, remember the guide to God, the letter O. God is omnipresent. He's present everywhere. But in the Bible, God is especially and intensely present here on earth on hills and mountains.

[9 : 08] So think of Mount Sinai. Where was God's intense, direct presence? On a mountain, a hill. In fact, Eden is called a mountain in Ezekiel.

And who was directly in Eden with Adam? God. And where is the temple eventually built in Jerusalem? With God's special presence, the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies.

Where is that found? On Mount Zion, a hill. Which is why Psalm 24 calls it his holy place. And the book of Hebrews even calls heaven itself the true Mount Zion.

Heaven is the highest point of creation where God directly dwells in all his greatness with the angels worshipping around his throne. God dwells on hills.

And so Psalm 24 asks the all-important question, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? It almost has this tone of astonishment.

[10 : 23] Who could ever have the right to stand before that greatness? Who could ever survive that holiness? Because the problem is, we can't.

This is the great problem of humanity. Our sin has shut us out from the presence of the Lord. Our unholiness has disqualified us from ascending that hill. We've lost the right. Which is what happened to Adam in the garden, isn't it?

What was the big consequence of Adam's sin? He was cast out of the garden. Out of Eden. Sent away from the presence of the Lord. Down the hill. And that is where we are all living right now. This is the great problem of humanity. We are separated from the God who made us. And ever since that moment in the garden, there has been a long-locked door between God and man.

[11 : 34] That is why in verse 9, did you see? It speaks of the ancient doors. There is an ancient door existing there ever since the garden, barring us from the God of life.

And when you live away from the God of life, there's only death. The misery that we feel right now, that is the misery of being down this hill.

The pain in your life, the lostness, that longing for meaning and life, that is the pain of being behind these ancient doors.

And as we are on our own, we cannot get back. It is too dangerous to go back. Because if a sinner were now to ascend that hill and come into that greatness, that holiness would just consume us. It's like approaching a raging fire without any protective gear. It would be like swimming out to sea into the center of a hurricane.

[12 : 40] No one can survive that. Without holiness, no one will see God and live. God is too pure, too great. And so God's greatness should give us great caution.

And we so easily forget that. We think, if I were to ever meet God, I'll be fine just the way I am. And it is worth asking ourselves that.

If you were to ever meet your maker now, as you are on your own, how do you think you'll do?

Because we can actually often think the opposite of Psalm 24.

We often think God should be grateful to have me. We can live like we are at the top of the mountain, and God needs to approach me and meet my standard, and then maybe I'll give him the time of day.

But when we think that, we have got it completely upside down. No, we are the ones in desperate need of entering those doors and ascending that hill. But no one here, on our own, as we are, no one can do that.

[13 : 49] Which is exactly why the psalm cries out, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?

And astonishingly, this psalm gives the answer. This psalm is not a song of despair that just asks the question and leaves us in hopelessness.

No, this is a joy-filled psalm that cries out, it is possible to ascend this hill. It is possible for one man. Only a clean man can ascend the hill. And this is my second point today, my final point. Only a clean man can ascend the hill. Look at the answer in verse 4.

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.

[14 : 54] Look what it takes to rightfully enter into the king's throne room. Only someone with clean hands and a pure heart. Now the term clean hands, it means to be innocent in action.

So our hands are what we do things with, aren't they? Our hands reach out into the world and do things. And when someone does something bad, we might say they have blood on their hands. They're unclean. But someone with clean hands means someone who is innocent. Someone who has never, ever committed a sin.

And a pure heart, it means pure in thought and desire. So not only innocent on the outside, but innocent within. And that matters, doesn't it?

We might be able to put up a nice, clean front on the outside. But when you find out what someone really thinks, and you discover what's really going on behind closed doors in their life, it makes them not so clean after all.

[16 : 05] Well, God sees our thought life and our desires, and he cares about it. And God is so great, only someone with clean hands and a pure heart can ascend that hill.

And someone who, did you see, who does not lift up his soul to what is false. It's talking about worship here. We lift up our souls in worship.

That's what we're doing right now. We are lifting up our souls to God as we hear from him. And only a clean man who perfectly lifts up his soul to God, only that man can stand in God's holy presence. And so this is the standard. And it is a very, very perfectly high standard. And this can only apply to one person.

This is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since those ancient doors were shut, we have been longing for someone to ascend that hill, someone who is qualified to stand before the Lord.

[17:15] And finally, finally, we have found him in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you were to inspect Christ's hands, there isn't a speck of uncleanness on them.

He is the spotless lamb who walked this earth in perfect sinlessness. And if you were to open up his heart and you examined his thought life and weighed up every single motive and desire, you would only be left speechless at the sheer purity of his soul.

The soul that was only ever lifted up to his father in love and obedience. The obedience that went all the way to the cross. And this holiness of Christ is so radiant, so pure in its brightness, only his holiness can stand before the living God and not be consumed.

Only Christ can enter into that greatness and majesty and glory and not only survive, but actually shine just as bright.

The Lord Jesus Christ can ascend the hill of the Lord and confidently and rightfully stand before the Almighty.

[18:37] And Jesus is the only person, the only one who can say, I deserve to be here. And because of his pure obedience, verse 5, Jesus was rewarded with blessing from the Lord, crowned with all authority in heaven and on earth.

And as he left the grave, that was Christ receiving righteousness, approval from the God of his salvation. God declaring Jesus to be the perfect, sinless son of God.

And with those clean hands and that pure heart, where did Jesus go? He ascended. As Jesus went up to heaven, that was him ascending the hill of the Lord, entering into the true Mount Zion, the holy place of heaven itself, where he now rightfully lives in the direct presence of God Almighty and not merely standing there, but now sitting, sitting on the throne of God in all his glory.

And so if God and man has been separated behind that long locked door, what must be cried out now that the Lord Jesus has come? Verse 7, we must cry out, lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Lift up your heads. It implies the gates have been sleeping sleeping the whole time. It's like when you sit in a chair for a while and your head begins to droop a bit, like now, you know, your head's drooping a bit.

[20:20] But now the psalm cries out, wake up, lift up your heads, O gates. And those ancient doors that have been shut since the garden, lift them up.

Because there is now a man with clean hands and a pure heart. There is now a King of glory and he must, he deserves to come into the presence of the Lord.

Verse 7 onwards, you can kind of think of as the anthem to sing for Christ's entrance into heaven. You can imagine the angels singing it. Gates of heaven open up.

Christ is coming in. Christ is coming in. And it's interesting. Did you notice, verse 4 speaks of a man who can ascend the hill.

But then verse 7 onwards starts speaking of the King of glory coming in. And who is the King of glory? Verse 8, the Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

[21:24] It is both a man with clean hands and the divine Lord who enters these gates. which again can only be the Lord Jesus Christ.

The perfect human and the King of glory. The one who is both dust of the earth and owns the earth. The Saviour who was born on our side of the gate and at the bottom of the hill born into this misery and pain.

But after the mighty battle and victory of the cross, the gates are flung open for him. But there's something missing, isn't there?

What about us? Because we don't have clean hands. And after the week just gone, maybe after this morning, you might be very aware of that uncleanness.

Open up any of our hearts and there isn't purity. How can we ever ascend that hill? How can we ever stand before the living God and survive?

[22:32] Well, there is a glorious verse nestled in the middle of this psalm that changes everything for you. Verse 6. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Notice the change in who this psalm is talking about. Verse 3. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Answer. Verse 4. He, one man who has clean hands, he will receive blessing, but then it shifts to

more than one man.

Verse 6. Such is the generation of those who seek him. Such is the people who seek the face of God. Even though this is written centuries before Christ, we already see what Christ achieves, his purity and his right to stand before God, it all overflows to a whole generation beyond him.

It flows to every single person who seeks God in faith. And so Psalm 24 is painting this wonderful picture of what Christ has done for us.

One flawless man ascending that mountain and bringing a whole generation with him. An entire community of men and women, boys and girls leading us all up that hill and saying, open up the gates for them.

[24 : 01] Open up the gates for them. They're with me. I'm bringing them in. And that is what the church is. We are unclean sinners but sinners brought up the mountain back to our God led by the King of Glory who seek him in faith and his sinlessness becomes ours.

His victory on the cross washes our hands clean. And so there is now a way up that hill. Christ is there in heaven guaranteeing our right to stand before the living God.

And this matters for everyone here today because one day all of us will meet God. Either we will die and we will meet our maker or Christ will return and we will be brought before the judgment seat of God.

Either way, every human being will be brought into God's presence. But the question is will you be able to stand in his presence? Will you be welcomed before God with joy and peace and have the right to be there?

On that day will you stand or will you fall? Will you realize you've had it upside down the whole time? But there is a way to stand.

[25 : 29] If you are here today and you are looking for God but maybe you feel shut out or you think that you can't come to him and you see your unclean hands and you are very aware of being on the wrong side of the gate, well there is hope.

There is a man in heaven right now and he, he is the way to stand before God. and to a generation outside the gate to a world at the bottom of this hill that man calls to you now come in trust in me seek me and you can ascend this hill.

And when you do the day that you meet your maker will never be a day of fear for you. No, you can stand with confidence before God. And so for all of us in Christ this means something quite extraordinary.

Your life may be down here on earth but it is inseparably bound up in heaven. And Christ this very moment brings you before the Father and he says to you you have the right to be here.

When you go to meet your maker you now have the right to be there. and even down here on earth when you pray and you bring your requests before the throne of grace we must never think we can't do that.

[27 : 02] We must never think God won't want me coming to him. No, Christ has opened up the gates of heaven for you and guarantees your right to stand before that throne.

And so God hears you and he welcomes you. because there is a man in heaven now nothing can separate you from your God.

And when the sinless man returns the gates between heaven and earth will be open forever. The dwelling place of God will be with man and for those in Christ we will stand in that presence all because of Jesus.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? It is the Lord Jesus Christ the King of glory. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.