



## The Psalms (Part 6) – The King of Glory

JT English – June 23, 2019

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How are we doing? Good. If you have a Bible, grab it. If you don't, there should be one in front of you. Psalm 24. As we continue our sermon series and our walk through the book of Psalms this summer, you may be wondering why there are Christmas trees and dinosaurs behind me. If you don't know, we're having VBS this week. We're going to talk about that in a second.

I want to be clear. We are not making any theological statements with rainbows on the stage, nor are we making theological statements about the age of the earth with dinosaurs. I have gotten both of those questions this morning. So, before you email me, those are just Christmas trees and dinosaurs. Kids like colors and they like dinosaurs. So smile. Be happy.

I'm really excited about this week. VBS is one of my favorite weeks to be on staff at The Village Church for a few reasons. First, it's one of those times where the church comes together and you really see the church being the church together. You realize, "This isn't just a performance; this is participation." We have 500 volunteers from The Village Church participating in one way or the other, and that's incredible. Praise the Lord.

Five hundred people willing to give up a week of their time, both time before VBS and after VBS, to serve these little kids. We had 900 registrants for VBS. Here's what God put on my heart this morning as we were praying together as a staff. I want to see if maybe he'll put it on your heart too. It would be awesome if the Lord saved 5, 10, 15, 20 kids. Wouldn't that be incredible? But do you know what would be better? What if he saved like 100 or 200 or 300 kids?

Nine hundred students, many of whom are not Christians, are going to hear the good news of Jesus Christ this week, so let's be a church that prays relentlessly that their hearts of stone would become hearts of flesh; that they'd be transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son; whether they're hearing the gospel for the first time or the hundredth time, that the Holy Spirit would open their ears and open their hearts to the good news of Jesus.

So, whether you're serving or not this week, I'm going to ask you to serve by praying for these kids, that they would have their eyes and their hearts opened up to the good news of the gospel this week. Will you commit to praying with us? Awesome. Thank you so much. Okay. As you're praying, one of the things you can pray for...

The theme this year is "God with us," this idea that God is with us. He is the one who is Immanuel, and he is with his people. That's one of the themes we're actually going to see today in Psalm 24. So, if you have your Bible, Psalm 24:1. David writes this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

**"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 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!"**

Let me give you context for when we believe David wrote this psalm. David is king over Israel, but he is reminding God's people of their story of origin, of where they've come from and what God has done in their midst. Israel was a people who were selected by God to bring blessing to the nations. This is Abraham's family. Though they were selected by God to bring blessing to the nations, they had been in exile in Egypt, and they were in need of being restored to the Promised Land.

After several decades of wandering in the wilderness, God comes to them. He comes to them in the ark, and they have the presence of God with them. They eventually take this Promised Land God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they lost the ark. The Philistines took the ark. Eventually, they recapture it. If you want to read this story, you can read about it in 1 Chronicles 15 and 16. First Chronicles 15 and 16 tell us about this incredible story of David and Israel recapturing the ark and taking the ark up into the tabernacle, as the ark ascends the holy hill of God.

Here is Israel celebrating their Creator, their Redeemer, the one who has fought a battle for them and has liberated them. He's now back in the camp with them, and David is writing a song of salvation. He's writing a song celebrating who God is and what God has done, that God is back with them in the ark of the covenant and they are meant to celebrate their Creator.

There are three points I want to walk through over the course of this sermon: First, *God is the Creator*. Secondly, *We were made for his presence, but we've been exiled*. Thirdly, *Only he can make a way*. God is the Creator of all things, you and I were made for his presence but have been exiled, and only he can make a way for us to enjoy his presence again. Look back at the text to verse 1. "**The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein...**" God is the Creator of all things.

One of the most important distinctions in the Bible, but maybe even more importantly than in the Bible, one of the most important distinctions you can make in your life is the confession and recognition that God is God and you are not. God is the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, the Redeemer of all things, the one who preserves all things. You are a limited creature. God is God, and you are not.

The psalmist is giving us one of the most important things we can confess as a church, that God is the Creator of all things; we are not. The psalmist starts exactly where the Bible starts in Genesis 1:1-2, where it says, "**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**"

The psalmist is trying to convince you... At the very beginning of his psalm, David says God is the Creator of all things; you are not, and the primary goal of your life, the primary fiber of every single part of your being is to bring worship, honor, and glory to God alone, because he is the Creator; you are the creature. You were created to love and worship God alone.

I want to make the following clear: The goal of your life is not a fat paycheck. The goal of your life is not a beautiful family. It's not self-actualization through a job or some relationship. The goal of your life is not the accumulation of a bunch of things. The primary goal of your life is not even perfect health or an "Instagrammable" life or being the perfect mom or the perfect dad or the perfect spouse or the perfect sibling. The primary goal of the creation is to bring glory to the Creator. That's what Psalm 24 is saying. God and God alone is the Creator.

At home, I'm working with my son Thomas through a discipleship tool. It's a tool in a question-and-answer format, where you ask a question and they answer. I told him he'd get a gumball machine if he got 20 of these. You can judge me if you want. I don't care. It's a gumball machine. There are 52 questions. The first one might be the most important one. It asks a really simple question. It says, "What is your greatest hope in life and death?"

Have you ever stopped to answer that question yourself? What is your greatest hope in life and death? The answer to the question is, "Our greatest hope in life and death is that we are not our own but belong to God." Your life is not your own. Your family is not your own. The future is not your own. Your kids' future is not your own. Your spouse's future is not your own. The future of this church is not yours. Everything belongs to God.

So, David begins this psalm by rightly orienting our hearts and our minds by saying, "This God who is here in the ark and is being marched up a hill...he is the Creator of all things. You are his creatures. He has redeemed you out of slavery in sin and the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the goal of your life is to bring honor and worship to him."

The Bible is presenting all of life through a God-centered lens. There's nothing too small or too big. Everything is viewed through the spectacles of a God-centered lens. So often we want to read the Bible as if it's a story about *us*, but David is reminding us here that this is a story about who *God* is and what God has done.

If you can, I want you to imagine what this picture would have been like. I want you to imagine the host of Israel gathered around Mount Zion. I want you to imagine the ark of the covenant, representing the promises and the presence of God, and God's priests carrying God's presence up onto God's mountain, into the tabernacle, where he would be enthroned forever as their Creator and Redeemer. David is saying, "The goal of Israel, the goal of our lives is to bring worship to this God."

Look at verse 3. David asks a question. "**Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?**" You were made to enjoy the presence of God, but you and I have been exiled from the presence of God. We can't get there ourselves. We can't go up the holy hill of the Lord. You can't go up where God lives. Only God lives there. Psalm 15 asks it this way: "O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent, and who can live on your holy hill?"

Have you ever noticed how the Bible uses mountains or hills in really important places in the storyline of Scripture? Here are a few examples. Genesis, chapter 1. God is the one enthroned in Eden, and the rivers flow out from it. God's original creation is this mountain paradise where he exists with humanity, and they are exiled off of the mountain.

Or think about Genesis, chapter 22, with Abraham. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son and to go up Mount Moriah into God's presence in order to sacrifice his son where God provides another sacrifice. Or think about Exodus 19-24, where Israel is wandering in the wilderness, wondering where God's presence is, looking for him, hoping they will be restored to the Promised Land, and God meets Moses up on a mountaintop called Mount Sinai.

Or think here of Zion, this place that God has now been marched up into this holy hill, showing that God is the Creator of all things. He is holy, he is lifted up, and we have to ascend into his presence, but we are lowly. We are creatures unworthy of ascending into God's presence. The Bible is telling this story over and over and over again.

It even tells the story of what it looks like when we try to ascend the hill of the Lord with our own credentials, our own means. It's the story of Babel. We want to make a name great for ourselves, not a name great for God, so we want to build civilization. We want to build a mountain for ourselves through accumulation of wealth or accumulation of power, accumulation of influence, so that *our* name would be great, not God's name.

You see, we have a fundamental instinct even in our sinfulness to know that we have to go *up* to God. David is asking a really important question: *Who?* Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Who can go up into his presence? Who? Which one of you will go up to this God's presence who is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things? Do you dare walk up into his presence? David then says there are actually qualifications. There *is* a person who can go up into God's presence.

Here's what you need to have if you're going to go up into God's presence and ascend his hill: you need to have *clean hands*. When the Bible talks about clean hands, it says it's not just ritual purification, though it's that, but it's also that you would never participate in injustice. You would never bring harm to anybody else. You would never spill somebody else's blood. You would never gain wealth through unjust means or you'd never harm another image-bearer.

The Bible also says you have to have a *pure heart*. It's not just that you can be externally pure or externally righteous. The Bible says you have to have an *internal* righteousness. Not just external purity matters, but internal motives matter also. You have to have a pure heart if you want to ascend the hill of the Lord. David was familiar with this. You might remember a similar line used in David's life. Remember when the prophet Samuel was looking for the next king of Israel?

He goes to Jesse's family and says, "Bring all of your sons together. I'm looking to anoint the next king of Israel." Jesse gathers all of his sons together. Because man looks at the outward appearance, he gathers all of the strong brothers, the ones you think might rule over Israel, and leaves the shepherd boy off to the side. God says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesus says something similar in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:8, that it is the pure in heart who will see God.

So, David is saying if you have clean hands, if you're externally pure and internally pure, that there are no false motivations, then you can ascend the hill of the Lord. But he's not done yet. What else do you need to have? You can *never have worshiped falsely*. Augustine, the fourth-century bishop, says your primary problem isn't just that you *believe* wrong things or just that you *do* wrong things. He says your primary problem is that you do wrong things and think wrong things because you *love* wrong things.

He says the primary problem you have is disordered loves. You don't just love enough but you love too much, and you love the wrong things too much. So, clean hands, pure heart, rightly ordered loves through true worship. Finally, you must be *without deceit*. That one is simple. You can't lie. You have to be a person of honesty and truth and justice. Raise your hand if you made it through all of those qualifications in order to enter into the presence of God. Good! You agree with the Bible, because the Bible says in Psalm 14:2-3 that there is not one who does good. Not even one.

Several years ago, I was down in College Station for a ministry event, and I happened to get to go to a sporting event. The Aggies were playing Alabama in football. I did not have a ticket to the game, but I love college football. Like, I *love* college football. So I asked my wife. I was like, "Hey, can we just go to the game day experience? I just want to smell the hot dogs." Which sounds weird now that I just said that out loud, but that's what I wanted to do. Football has a smell to it. Do you know what I mean? You're like, "Oh, that September football smell."

So we went to this tailgate, and I was with some friends who had a buddy who was putting on a big Aggie booster tailgate they invited us to. So we're sitting there, just having fun, enjoying each other's company and just laughing together and enjoying what's hopefully going to be a good football game. I was going to just enjoy the tailgate, and then I was going to go to a restaurant or back to my hotel and watch the game.

I'm sitting there, and the booster, the prominent guy who clearly had some connections, comes over to the group of friends I'm talking to, and he says, "Hey, let's go onto the field for warm-ups." I'm like, "Oh. Okay. Hey, thanks for bringing me." I'm trying to quietly excuse myself. He's like, "No, no, no. You're coming with me. You're with me." I'm like, "Oh man. Here we go." I have this internal... "I have no credentials, no qualifications. I do not belong on the field. I'm not just following you because you're confident. I'm not following you." He's like, "No, no, no. You're with me."

So then I have this internal fear welling up inside of me that what's going to happen is I'm going to get up to the front gate where the security officer is looking at credentials, and they're going to put me in some kind of a headlock and lock me up, and I'm going to spend the rest of my life in federal penitentiary. I'm serious. This is what goes through my head, that I'm going to be somehow found out to be a fraud. I'm not supposed to be where I am.

We get up to the front, and all this fear is welling up inside of me. He just stays at the front and says to the security guard, "He's with me," and they're like, "Go ahead." So I go right on through, and we go to the field for warm-ups, and we're watching. Nick Saban runs by, and there's the Alabama football team. The Aggies are right in front of us warming up, and it's about an hour before the game.

Then he says to me, "Hey, would you like to run onto the field with the Aggies?" I'm like, "Absolutely not. There is no way I'm doing that." He's like, "No, no, no. It'll be fine." You know those people who do everything with confidence? That's what was happening here. He's like, "It'll be fine." I'm like, "For *you*! You have a credential. I'm not supposed to be here." He's like, "It'll be fine."

So we go back behind the gates again, and Alabama takes the field. Then the Aggies take the field, and I run onto the football field with the Aggies while they're playing Alabama, and I have no credentials. I'm living some of your dreams, and I don't even want to be there. It was unbelievable. I have a video of it. This really happened. I'm not embellishing any of this. "He's with me." I wasn't supposed to be there. I had no qualifications, no credentials, but "He's with me."

Look at verse 7. **"Lift up your heads, O gates! And 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..."** Notice this: the gates are flinging open for somebody. The gates that are closed on us, for somebody the gates are widely opened with a ferocity. **"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!"**

Just when we thought nobody had the credentials, just when we thought there were absolutely no qualifications to ascend the hill of the Lord, David tells us somebody *does* and somebody *can* go up the hill. Somebody *will* ascend this hill. But who is it? he asks. Only the King of Glory. Only the one who is mighty in battle, the one who is a warrior.

The gates and the ancient doors don't just gently open for the King after he has won a victorious battle. After the King comes back from battle after having won a victory for his people, the gates fling open in celebration. The doors lift up with ferocity, and the King is brought in. And who is this King? None other than God himself. God has won a victory for his people. God has done something on behalf of his people, and the gates fly open.

"So, JT, you're telling me nobody can go up God's hill except God himself?" That's exactly what I'm telling you. You can't go up the hill. Only God can ascend the hill. Only God gets to go up into God's presence on his own merits, on his own credentials, but the Bible presents the crucifixion of Jesus as the Lord taking the hill. The Bible presents the crucifixion of Jesus as the Lord ascending the hill again.

How will we enjoy the presence of God? Because Christ takes the hill for us, the one who has clean hands, the one who has a pure heart, the one who never lifted up his heart to falsehood, the one who never spoke one word of deceit or falsehood, the one who was perfect in every way, who had every single qualification. We watch him in the crucifixion ascend the hill of Golgotha, ascend the hill of Calvary.

I want you to think about this imagery for just a minute. What we've just read in this psalm is that God himself, between the cherubim, in the ark of the covenant, has ascended this hill once before. He just won a victory for his people over the Philistines. He just won a victory for his people over

the Egyptians, and here we see again this same God in the Son taking the same hill in order to deliver his people from Satan, sin, and death.

The same God who was enthroned between the cherubim is the same God who's now enthroned between two thieves as he hangs on a cross. The good news of the gospel is that the God who could have fought against us at Calvary fights *for* us. Do not miss that. The good news of the gospel is that the God who would have justly and rightly gone to Calvary and crushed our heads... He could have fought against us and conquered us as his enemies forever.

Instead, he fights *for* us, delivering us *from* our enemies, giving us forgiveness freely forever, giving us justification, giving us sanctification, giving us joy, peace, and, most importantly, the presence of God forever. Instead of crushing us, he accepts us. Instead of rejecting us, he adopts us. Instead of closing the gates on our face, he flings them open for all who are in Christ.

Not only did Jesus take the hill at Calvary, at Golgotha; he also takes the hill in the ascension. After his death and resurrection, he spends 40 days with his disciples, and then he ascends into the heavens once more, into the true temple, into the true tabernacle, the true presence of God. The author of Hebrews makes the same argument I'm trying to make right now when he says in Hebrews 6:19, "**We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul...**"

Did you catch that? You have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. "**...a hope that enters into...**" Jesus has entered into the Holy Place in his ascension. "**...the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**"

Here's what the author of Hebrews is trying to say: Jesus is a forerunner and has gone before us into the heavens in order to save you a spot. He is already there waiting for you, and the day is going to come where he says, "He's with me. She's with me. Lift the gates up. I ascended the hill on their behalf. They are mine. They are with me." The author of Hebrews is saying that Jesus is the one who ascends the true hill of the Lord into the heavens, that he has gone before us as a forerunner. You and I should find this, the author of Hebrews says, as a sure and steady hope.

God is the Creator of all things, you were made to enjoy his presence forever, and Christ has made a way. That's what the psalmist is trying to tell us. This psalm is about Christ. This psalm is about this

one who had a pure heart, who had clean hands, who had never lifted his heart up to falsehood or deceit, and who had never lied. He ascends the hill and brings us with him.

I want to make a few application points. First, for those of you who perhaps have never heard the gospel or you've heard it before and you just don't believe it, I just want to say I am so thankful you're here. Really. I'm so glad you would open your ears to the good news of the gospel. My prayer for you is that you would consider opening up your heart to the good news of the gospel. Think about the truths of what the Bible is trying to teach you today.

God in his Word is saying, "I am holy. I am lifted up. I am up in the hills, and you can't come to me on your own. You need me to do it for you." He's saying your life has been the story of Babel over and over and over and over and over, and you keep failing. You'll never have enough wealth to ascend the hill. You'll never have enough power to ascend the hill. You'll never have enough righteousness. You'll never have enough social influence. You'll never have enough days. You'll never garner enough strength.

Who can ascend the hill of the Lord but Christ? So, what I hope you would hear this morning is this simple good news of the gospel: grace is God doing *for* us that which we could never do for ourselves. The good news of the gospel is that what God requires of you God also has supplied *for* you in Christ. All you have to do this morning is to place your faith, your allegiance on him, and you get to stop climbing the exhausting hill.

How exhausting is it? How tired are you? How many more times are you going to try? What would it look like this morning for you to look to Christ, the one who came down in order to ascend the hill on our behalf? What would it look like for you to say, "I'm tired. I don't want to do this anymore. I want to place my faith upon Christ, the one who has accomplished that which I never could for myself"? That's the offer for you today. My hope for you is that you would.

Secondly, I want to talk to those of you who believe these things and have confessed these things. I have two hopes for you. First, my hope for you this morning is that you would be struck afresh by the beauty and the glory of Christ. Not the beauty and the glory of Christianity or the beauty and the glory of the Bible or the beauty and the glory of salvation. All of those things are wonderful. Yes, let's celebrate those things, but that's not what I'm saying. I want you to hear what I'm saying.

I want you to be struck afresh by the beauty of Christ and Christ alone. Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Only Christ, and he has, and he gives it to you. R.C. Sproul says it this way: "If we love Christ, it is appropriate to love him extravagantly, for he [alone] is worthy of extravagant love." Let's ask the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts to an extravagant love for Christ, that the Holy Spirit would birth in us today or renew or refresh this extravagant love, that Christ alone is enough and he alone is worthy.

The second thing I want to remind us of this morning is assurance of salvation. As one of your pastors, I know one of the things we can deal with most frequently and regularly is "Does God really love me? Am I really saved? Do I really not have to do anything? Am I really a part of this family? What about this ongoing struggle I have? What about this ongoing issue I'm dealing with?" or "Wouldn't I have made it farther along in the Christian life by now?" or "I don't feel his love for me. I'm not sure he has actually placed it upon me."

I want you to get an image in your mind. Right now... I know you can't see it. I know you can't hear it. Christ, this one who's described right here, the King of Glory, the Lord strong and mighty, mighty in battle...*this* one, the one the Bible is talking about, the King of Glory, the Lord of Hosts, the one who conquered Satan, your sin, and death at the cross...

He ascended into the heavens, and he is arrayed as a beautiful King, crowned with glory and honor, with battle marks to prove exactly what he has done on your behalf. He stands next to his Father, saying, "He's mine. She's mine," and he's saying your name. You have nothing else to do. You have no more mountains to climb. You have no more exhausting hills to traverse. Christ has done it.

Psalm 121 says, "**I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.**" This morning, church, lift your eyes to Calvary, the hills of heaven. Where does our help come from? It comes from Christ, the Maker of heaven and earth. Amen. Let's pray.

To you, Father, and to the Son and to the Spirit we offer all honor and glory and praise. Holy Spirit, would you be amongst us in this room even now, creating an extravagant love for Christ in our hearts? Would you also be in this room seeking and saving the lost? Perhaps there are men and women, lost sheep, who are here, and the Holy Spirit is pricking them and bringing them home, transferring them from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son.

We ask, Lord, that you would be mighty to save, that you would be the Lord strong and mighty to save, that new brothers and sisters would have the gates flung open for them and that Christ at this moment would be saying, "Mine. This one is mine. She's with me. He's with me." For the rest of us, would you persevere us in this life of faith? On this journey you've set before us, would you give us Christ and Christ alone? It's in his name we pray, amen.

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