

Psalms: The Songs of the People of God

Psalm 24: Ascending the Hill

Sunday, April 15, 2018

Introduction

Who can stand in the presence of God? Who qualifies to enter the place where God dwells? These are significant questions that are foundational to the Christian faith and are the central questions of Psalm 24. The answers that are given should leave us in awe of the grace and mercy of God.

Historical Context of Psalm 24

Psalms 24 is a Psalm of David and most believe that it was written as a song that would be sung as the army of Israel was returning to Jerusalem following a victorious battle and carrying the Ark of the Covenant into the city (which represents the presence of God).

The song contains three stanzas: A stanza about God (His greatness), a stanza about man (and how we can enter the presence of God) and a stanza about the King of Glory (our victorious King).

Stanza One: Who is God? (24:1-2)

- As the Psalm begins the first stanza reminds us of greatness of God and the scope of His dominion – God is over all the earth – it belongs to Him. All things and all people are His because He made them all (Genesis 1:9-10; Psalm 95:3-5).
- With this focus on the greatness of God we are encouraged to stand in awe. As we see His greatness it should remind us of our own comparative size – He is God and we are mere men (sinful men).

Stanza Two: Who is Man? (24:3-6)

- **The Central Question:** After establishing the greatness of God the central question of the passage is raised – who can come into the presence of God? What qualifications must be met in order to go to where God is? Who shall ascend?
- **The Holiness of God:** The second part of verse 3 reminds us that not only is God the owner of all things, but He is holy. This means He is completely pure and as such He cannot allow anyone in His presence that is not holy as He is holy.
- **The Answer:** The qualification for entering the presence of God, according to verses 3-4, is that a person must be outwardly holy (clean hands) and inwardly holy (a pure heart). (Psalm 15)

- **Our Inability – Our Disqualification:** All who are honest must admit that we have fallen short of the standard of holiness. The Scriptures are clear that we are all sinners and therefore we cannot enter the presence of God on our own (Romans 3:23).
- **The Gift of Imparted Righteousness (24:5-6):** In verse 5 we see the message of the Gospel. While God's standard is holiness, those who seek God and trust Him receive the gift of righteousness.

While the Psalm doesn't mention Jesus He is ultimately what makes the truth of verse 5 possible. Jesus came to be our sacrifice so that we can be seen as righteous in Him. He is the one who can climb the hill and enter the presence of God and He makes our way possible (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:1-4; 11-14).

Stanza Three: Who is the King of Glory (24:7-10)

- While the original context is of a victorious army marching toward Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant, the Psalm also foreshadows a day when the true King will enter Jerusalem in victory. The gift of verse 5 is available because of this victorious king of glory.
- **A Partial Fulfillment:** While the true fulfillment of this Psalm is still in the future there is a picture that we must see: There was a day when a king entered Jerusalem to much fanfare (Jesus's triumphal entry). It is also significant that each Sunday during this time Psalm 24 was sung in the Temple. On that Sunday before the cross, as Jesus entered Jerusalem as king, the declaration of the coming king was sung in the Temple (Matthew 21:1-11).
- **The Ultimate Fulfillment:** There is still a day to come when Jesus will go to battle and defeat His enemies once and for all. After that He will enter Jerusalem as the victorious and final king. He can climb the hill on our behalf and make our entry into the presence of God available.
- **Charles Spurgeon –** *It is possible you are saying, 'I shall never enter into the heaven of God, for I have neither clean hands nor a pure heart.' Look then to Christ, who has already climbed the holy hill. He has entered as the forerunner of those who trust Him. Follow in His footsteps and repose upon His merit. He rides triumphantly into heaven, and you shall ride there too if you trust Him. 'But how can I get the character described?' say you. The Spirit of God will give you that. He will create in you a new heart and a right spirit. Faith in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit, and has all the virtues wrapped up in it.*