

"The King of Glory Shall Come In. A Palm Sunday Sermon"

Today's the day that many churches remember and celebrate Palm Sunday. That's the day when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem the Sunday before he was crucified. It's sometimes called the triumphal entry, because he entered in under the praises of the people who were calling on him as the king and promised Messiah. The gospels record the people singing parts of Psalm 118 as Jesus rode into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest! These are shouts of praise that come from Psalm 118.

And yet for today, our sermon is not on Psalm 118 but on Psalm 24. The Bible doesn't record this Psalm being sung as Jesus rode up into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. And yet certainly this is a fitting psalm for Palm Sunday. It clearly is a song of the advent of the great king. Surely nothing fulfills this song more literally than the procession of Jesus that Palm Sunday up into Jerusalem and into the temple. And in fact, not only is this quite a fitting Psalm to think about on Palm Sunday, but it's actually quite possible that it was sung on that first Palm Sunday. Rabbinic inscriptions from that time actually specifically note that this is a Psalm to be sung on the first day of the week. Of course, the first day of the week is Sunday. And so it's quite possible that on Palm Sunday the priests were providentially in the temple singing Psalm 24 even as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And so Psalm 24 is a fitting psalm to think about today. It's a song of advent; of God coming to his people. We don't know for certain the original context of this psalm. The psalm is attributed to King David, and so it's very likely that it was describing the return of the Ark into the tabernacle in Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol God's presence, and so conceivably this psalm could have been first written to describe the Ark being brought into Jerusalem. That event is described in 2 Samuel chapter 6, when David brings the Ark to Jerusalem. It would be completely fitting with what the Ark represented to describe the bringing of the Ark into the tabernacle as an advent of God. Presumably this psalm would have then been sung any time the Ark was brought out to a battle and then later returned to the tabernacle.

And yet it seems that in Israel this psalm started to take on a more Messianic hope. In other words, it seems that the Jews started singing this psalm with a greater Messianic expectation. The prophet Malachi prophesied saying, "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (3:1). Malachi's prophecy expresses the hope people were having as they sang Psalm 24. They were looking for the Messiah to come triumphantly into the temple. Jesus fulfills Malachi's prophecy and this psalm. On that Palm Sunday he rode into Jerusalem and he rode into the temple. Of course, Jesus only *initially* fulfilled this psalm. He will bring it to its complete fulfillment at his final advent. When Jesus returns, he will come in explicit glory. He'll come in the clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13:26). That will be the final coming of the great King of Glory, and certainly a day to sing praises to our God.

And so that's a big picture of this psalm. Let's dig into the individual parts a little bit more. And what I'd like us to be thinking about as we analyze this passage is how it calls us to receive the coming king. As we look at this psalm,

we'll see that it's not only about the coming of the King of Glory. It is also about how God's people receive the King of Glory. This is a question we need to constantly ask ourselves as well. How do we respond to the coming of the king? King Jesus has already come once, and he's coming again. Both of Jesus' comings demand a response. We'll be thinking about that response as we study this psalm a little further.

Look with me first on the structure of this psalm. It can be divided up into three sections. The first section is verses 1-2. The second section is verses 3-6. The third section is verses 7-10. The first section deals with God as the creator. As the creator, all the earth, and all the inhabitants of the earth, belongs to him. This might at first seem completely unrelated to the rest of the psalm. However, it's actually quite related. You see the second and third section deal with questions of "Who?" Of this God and all the humans he created, the second section asks in verse 3 a "who" question. "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?" And the third section asks another "who" question in verses 8 and 10 as it describes the coming of the king. It asks, "Who is this King of glory?"

And so the first section in verses 1-2 set the context for the second and third sections. The first section states an absolute truth. God created all things. Thus, all things belong to him. But the special emphasis in these first two verses are the humans that he created. It's not just the earth that belongs to the Lord, it's the fullness of the earth. And the psalm goes on to explain what this fullness refers to: all those who dwell on the earth. This seems to specifically refer to humans. To mankind. And so the psalm starts out by making abundantly clear that every man, woman, and child belongs to God.

And yet in the second section, in verses 3-6, we learn an important qualification. The second section addresses who can receive the Lord. Who can come before the presence of the Lord. Most specifically, who will benefit from the salvation of God. In other words, the first section shows that all belong to God, per creation. But in the second section, we learn that only some belong to God, per salvation. The complete scope of humanity from the first section is narrowed down in the second section. The first section says that God is God of all, as the creator. The second section says that God is Savior of only some.

The third section then introduces the King of Glory. The King of Glory is being received by the smaller subset of people identified in the second section of the psalm. And of course, this King of Glory is identified as the LORD God. The one who was introduced in the first section as the creator. This King of Glory is God of all, but he is especially King of his special people. These are the people who in the second section are described as receiving his blessings, his righteousness, and his salvation.

And so with the context of this first section, that all human beings belong to God, let's dig into the second and third sections. We'll begin with the second section in verse 3. Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? That's the question. Of all the humans mentioned in the opening section, which of them may go up to the hill of the Lord?

Well, let's make sure we all know what the hill of the Lord is. We need to remember the context. This was written by David, the king of the Jews. The Jews were God's chosen people whom he blessed in a number of specific ways. One of those blessings was to give them a tabernacle. The tabernacle was a tent that served as a temple. Originally this tent could be moved around from place to place whenever the Israelites were wandering in the desert. But when the Israelites were

settled into the Promised Land, the tabernacle was set up on top of Mount Zion in Jerusalem. And so, the hill of the Lord that's being referred to here is Mount Zion. That's the mountain that Jerusalem sat upon, the capital city of Israel. And that's where the tabernacle sat upon.

And so the question is ultimately about who can come into the presence of the Lord. Who can come before God in his holy temple? That is what the tabernacle represented. That is what Mount Zion stood for. It was where God was. The God who created the heavens and the earth looked down especially upon his people in the tabernacle. That was a blessing he had given to the Jews at that time. They would approach him by coming to the temple. Of course, we'll see in the third section, that this psalm envisions the people coming to the tabernacle to welcome God. To receive him in his holy place. He's envisioned as a mighty warrior returning to his palace after a victory. So the nuance here is not only about who can go up to the temple where God's presence was, but who can go up to receive the Lord in his holy place. Again, think in terms of the Ark of the Covenant. God's presence was understood to be generally present in the tabernacle, but most specifically in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark could be transported; it was essentially a box on poles. So it could be moved around, to bring God's special presence to the battle field, for example. But normally the Ark would reside in the tabernacle, in the most holy place inside the tabernacle. And so when the Ark was brought back into the tabernacle, this psalm would have been a fitting one to sing. It was as if God's people were waiting at the temple for God's presence to come when the Ark was brought. This might sound a bit mystical, but the people were supposed to recognize these things symbolically. God could not ultimately be contained in a box or in a tent, but God chose to use these earthly things to bless the Jews with a tangible expression of his spiritual presence.

But as this psalm asks, and as this psalm answers, not everyone could come before the Lord's presence. Not everyone could come before the Lord at his tabernacle. Verse 4 goes on to say who can come. "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully." These are requirements for coming before the Lord to receive him. There's two parts to this. The first part has to do with cleanliness. The second part has to do with truth. The first part has the typical parallelism and repetition that you find in Hebrew poetry: clean hands and a pure heart. These both deal with hygiene, so to speak: cleanliness and purity. But one is focused on the externals, the hands, and the other on the internals, the heart. In other words, the whole man needs to be pure before God. The idea with the clean hands is concerning the innocence of your actions. If you murder someone in cold blood, you don't have clean hands. But just having godly actions, isn't enough. Even our heart; our inward person; that too needs to be clean and pure if we are to approach God. That's the first requirement. If we are to come before God, we need to be wholly pure. The second requirement is about truth.

The second part of verse 4 talks about not lifting up your soul to an idol nor swearing deceitfully. I actually don't prefer the translation here. The Hebrew word for idol has two possible meanings. In addition to idol, it can also mean vanity or fraud or deceit. Hebrew poetry likes to repeat things in sets with related words, and since the last line did just that concerning purity, it'd make sense to translate this word idol with its other usage. For example, the ESV translates this as, he "who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully." I think that's a better translation here. And so it says that if we are to come to worship God, we must come in truth. Jesus had said in John chapter 4 that true worship was to be done in Spirit and in truth. Here the Psalmist also highlights the importance of worshippers coming in truth. Our God is a God of all truth. That's one of the great things that characterize him.

And so if we are to receive the Lord, this psalm tells us about the necessity for purity and truth. We need to people who are full of moral purity and who are people of truth. Not everyone is fit to come to the Lord and receive him, according to this psalm.

And yet certainly, we should all want to come to the Lord. We should all want to receive the Lord. Verse 5 tells us of the blessings of receiving the Lord. The one who comes to his holy hill will, quote, "Receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Three things are benefits of God according to this verse: blessings, righteousness, and salvation. Blessings. It is the people of God who are truly blessed. Though all the creation receives good things from God, it is particularly the people of God who have special blessings. Blessings not only limited to this life. Blessings not only for his care in this world. But blessings that extend beyond this life. Those blessings can be described in part by the next two items in this list. Surely righteousness and salvation are blessings from God. Surely God is the one who makes us righteous. He's the one who truly gives us a pure heart and makes us people of truth. That's an irony and tension that I'll address in a few moments: that we must come to God in purity and truth, but it is he who gives us righteousness. And surely God is our savior. He saves us from our sins, from our enemies, from his enemies, and grants us eternal life - another blessing.

Verse 6 goes on to identify the person able to come before God in his holy place. It's not an open ended question that's left unanswered. Who can come up to the hill of the Lord? Who can come to his presence? Who can come in purity and truth? Verse 6. Jacob. "This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek your face." In case you don't know, the patriarch Jacob would have been long dead by the time King David wrote this psalm. But Jacob was the father of the Jews. God gave Jacob a new name, the name "Israel." Jacob was the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. And so the psalmist says Jacob is the one who can come, not to refer back to one person, Jacob, but to refer to all who are represented by Jacob, the chosen people of God, the Israelites. God had reached down to Jacob and his descendants to make a covenant with them. To bless them by revealing to them that salvation is through God alone, and through his Messiah which he would send.

And yet, many a Jews have made a mistake here. They've read verses like this and placed their trust in their ethnicity and not in God. Just being ethnically a Jew was not enough. This psalm tells us that even in verse 4. If we are truly to receive God and his blessings, we need to receive him with a pure heart and with truth on our lips. And we need to actually receive him. Isn't that what the third section in this psalm shows, the call to receive the coming King of glory? To receive him with praises on our lips and open hearts? Certainly. The Jews should have been thankful for their ethnic heritage, for the ways God had reached out specifically to their family. But they shouldn't have trusted in it. John the Baptist warned many Jews of this in Luke 3:8. "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." Of course, when Jesus did ride into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday, the religious leaders wanted him to silence the praises of the people. They didn't want the people to be welcoming him as the coming King in the very fashion of this psalm. But Jesus replied, that if the people were quiet, then "Even the stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). I hope you see the point there. Being a Jew alone is not enough. The Jews who rightly sought God in faith, could come before God. But this psalm was never intended to restrict this access to God *only* through the Jews. Instead, the Jews were supposed to bring this message of God to the world. To all who are created by God! That all who belong to God by way of creation, might also have opportunity to belong to God by way of salvation.

But if the Jewish people as a whole would not bring this about, God would intervene and use his Messiah, also a Jew, to put this worldwide plan into action.

And yet even as Jesus has done that, even as he opens the way for all to come to God, there is still a contrast. Not everyone in this world has come to God. Not everyone has welcomed him in faith. And so there remains two groups. The larger group of all mankind, and the smaller group of those who come before God and receive his salvation and presence.

Let's look at the third and final section of this psalm now. Begin in verse 7. It says, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in." There's a glorious announcement here. This is where the advent theme in this psalm really comes out. The psalm announces the coming of the King. The gates and the doors of the temple are personified here to open wide for the coming of the King! And what the gates and doors are doing is exactly what the people should be doing. They need to be opening their hearts and souls for the coming of the King! They need to receive him just as wholeheartedly. And that's what the repeated question and answer in verses 8-10 brings out. This would surely have been read or sung responsively. Someone would have asked the question in verse 8, "Who is this King of glory?" And the people would have sung out, "The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in." Then the question again in verse 10; again someone would cry this out, "Who is this King of glory?" And the people would again respond, "The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory." Of course, if this was done to usher the Ark of the Covenant into the tabernacle, this could have been sung as a holy processional as the Ark was marched up into the tabernacle. All very glorious!

And so this describes an advent. It describes the coming of the King. But notice who the King is here. It's not king David who wrote the psalm. This is the King of Glory. Who is he? The LORD. In the Hebrew it's the divine name of Yahweh. Yahweh is the King of Glory. He's mighty and strong. The imagery here is war imagery. He's mighty in battle. And he is also the LORD of hosts. The word "hosts" is a fancy word for an army. Under the LORD's control are armies. Surely this refers to his angelic forces that are always under his control. It is this mighty God who created all things and who controls the armies of heaven. It is he who has come as the King of Glory. It is he who has come victoriously. Triumphantly. Not to all mankind. But particularly to his chosen people. Those whom he has saved. Of course, as we see the great King revealed as God, we realize that God always intended for himself to be the king of his people. Not a mere human ruler to rule over his people. He himself would come and rule his people. That's what this psalm pictures for us.

My friends, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this psalm. I hope as we have read and studied this psalm, you have seen Jesus. I hope you are already beginning to see ways in which this psalm is fulfilled by Jesus. Let me present to you two ways in which we see Jesus in this psalm. The first way is in this third section of this psalm. When this psalm declared the coming of the King of Glory into the temple, it looked forward. It looked forward to when Jesus himself would come into Mount Zion. When Jesus rode on a donkey that Palm Sunday, he rode into Jerusalem and up into the temple. He then "cleansed" the temple, because so many were there quite unworthily. Not ready to receive the Lord. Jesus is the King of Glory. Psalm 24 reveals that the King of Glory is God himself. And the New Testament reveals to us that Jesus is God himself, the Son of God come in the flesh. And so Jesus fulfills this psalm as God who came in the flesh. That's what kind of King we have. That's what kind of Messiah we have. The Messiah and King who is God

himself. Who is mighty and strong. Who is all powerful and all glorious. Not a mere man, but the God who came to man by becoming man.

And so as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday, this psalm found its greatest expression to date. In Luke 19:38, one of the things people declared when he rode in was, "Glory in the highest!" Indeed it was glory in the highest, as the King of Glory rode in that day. And yet the greatest expression of this psalm is still yet to come, isn't it? We look forward to another return of the king. The king is coming again - we said this at the beginning of this sermon. And though his glory was seen by faith on that first Palm Sunday, his glory will be abundantly clear to all at his second coming.

I think this is the clearest way that we see Jesus fulfill this psalm. But there is another important way in which we see Jesus in this psalm. You see, we noticed some tension in the second section, in verses 3-6. We saw that righteousness comes from God, but that in order to come to God and to receive him, we need to come as those who are pure and true. If that's the case, how can any of us come? Who of us is truly pure enough and truthful enough and godly enough that we could stand before the holy, almighty, King of kings, who created all that there is? Who? Who could stand? Who could come? The Bible is clear on this point. Man is depraved. We've rebelled against God. Even Israel, the descendants of Jacob were no different. God had told them back in Deuteronomy 9:5 that it was not because of their righteousness or their uprightness of heart that he was giving the Jews the Promised Land. No, God goes on to say that the people were actually stiff-necked. It was because of grace that God brought them into the Promised Land. And it was because of grace that God even gave them a physical tabernacle, and allotted for them Mount Zion to place the temple. And so psalm 24, in context, can't be read to say that the Jews in themselves had become worthy to come before God and receive him.

No, the reason the Jews could come to God, and the reason any of us can come to God, is because of Jesus. Jesus is the true Jacob. He is the true Israel. He is the only one in and of himself that is able to walk those steps up Mount Zion. He came as a man, with clean hands and a pure heart, with no falsehood or deceit on his lips. He sought God as man was supposed to do. He kept all God's righteous decrees. He did what we couldn't because of our sin. And so as Christians, we talk about identifying with Jesus. We think first about identifying with him in his death. That he died on the cross to bear the penalty for our sins. That's right. But we are also to identify with him in *his life*. In his life, he did what we could not do. He was righteous. He was righteous. When we turn to him in faith, we not only receive forgiveness, we not only receive salvation from our sins, but we receive righteousness. We receive alien righteousness. Righteousness that is not inherent in ourselves. It's Jesus' righteousness. But if we are united to Christ by faith, his righteousness is accredited to us. That's part of what our salvation is all about. That God sees us now as righteous. He sees us now as having clean hands and a pure heart. He sees us as proponents of truth. He sees us as godly people.

Do you see Christ in this psalm? All the questions asked in this psalm - they are ultimately answered by Jesus. Who is the King of Glory? Jesus is. Jesus who is God. Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? Jesus can. Jesus who is man, the only man who truly has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to what is false, nor sworn deceitfully. This is who Jesus is. The God-man who is our savior. He fulfills both ends of this psalm. Man's responsibility to come and receive God is done by the man Jesus Christ. God's faithfulness to come visit his people with his blessings is done by the God Jesus Christ.

This is how we meet the requirements of verse 4. We meet them in Christ. By faith in him. Be belonging to him by trusting our life to him. And this is how we receive the benefits of verse 5. We receive blessings in Jesus. We receive righteousness from Jesus who was righteous for us. We receive salvation from Jesus who came to earth to save us.

My friends, in this psalm, see Jesus! See the Lord who loves you so much that he came to this earth to save you. To bring you to God. To be your King of Glory. To bring you into the glorious presence of the God of all blessings. To make you a people chosen by God out of the world! See Jesus. He is what brings us these blessings.

And so as we study this psalm today, and as we see Jesus in this psalm, how can we not also think about how we receive the advent of our Lord? What sort of reception will you give the Lord Jesus in your heart? Will you come before the King as this psalm describes in purity and truth? Will you seek out your God? Will you praise the coming the King and open wide the doors of your heart? Surely that's the response described in this passage. That's the kind of response we should have to the coming of the king.

But as we think about applying this passage in light of Palm Sunday, we would do well to remember how this looked like on the first Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday lots of people outwardly rejoiced. They appeared to give a proper welcome of Jesus. But what did we read in Luke's gospel today? Jesus wept. Luke 19:41. He wept over Jerusalem. In Luke 19:44 Jesus said that the city ultimately missed his visit. In just a few days the crowds from the city would be crying out to crucify him. Regardless of how the city outwardly appeared to welcome him that Palm Sunday, at the end of the day his first coming was missed by so many.

I hope the application is clear. We need to inwardly, truly, receive Jesus. Not just something external. But internally. An outward reception isn't enough. It's not enough just to confess publically that you believe in Jesus. It isn't enough to just externally go to church and sing songs that Jesus is your Lord. Receiving Jesus is more than just about what you do that other's can see. It's about what's inside, that only God can see. It's about your heart. Heartily receive Jesus. Receive him in faith. Trust your life to him. And then act accordingly.

And if you do truly receive Jesus after his first coming, he will certainly receive you unto himself at his second coming. He, the King of Glory, will receive us unto glory. Amen.

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