

My Captivator

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[0 : 00] and let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you've called us into your presence this evening to declare your praise and to hear your word. We ask now, I ask now, that the meditations of my heart, the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be acceptable in your sight.

Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Well, this is the third of our series in soul-bearing psalms.

Soul-bearing because on one hand, they lay our souls bare before God, the one who knows our hearts. Soul-bearing because having had our souls laid bare, the psalms strengthen us, nourish us to be strengthened and flourish as we live in God's presence, as God's people.

Over the last, the two psalms over the last three weeks have woven together some themes that come together in this evening's psalm as Peter and Neil spoke to them over our past couple of studies with seeing how Psalm 19 brings together creation and the command of God and how last week we saw how praise is woven into the life of God's people.

And both of these come together as we've seen already as we've read and sung Psalm 24, our psalm for this evening. But as the psalms do, there's many ways, many facets for looking at these themes.

[1 : 37] And so we'll see this evening a different glimpse of how these things come together, of how it is that one who creates all things is also the one who saves, that the one who saves is the one in whose presence his people live.

Well, we've read the psalm. I won't read it again, but we'll be picking it up point by point as we go along this evening. So I'd encourage you to open your Bibles and have them open in front of you.

It's a short psalm, beautiful, powerful psalm. And there's just two things I want to note before we dig in. Thing number one to note before we dig in is that psalms have contexts.

Those of you who are here in the lead up to Easter will remember the time that we spent in Psalm 22. And as part of that series, Christian Hofstra stood in this spot and mentioned to us how Psalm 22 came in a sequence of psalms, which actually starts in chapter in Psalm 20 and runs through to our psalm in Psalm 24.

Psalms 20 and 21 are the prayer for the anointed king and rejoicing in that king's strength. Psalm 22 tells us of the afflicted king who is vindicated.

[3 : 01] Psalm 23 speaks to us of the shepherd king who provides. And so we come this evening to Psalm 24, the glorious king, the king of glory.

And all of these five psalms then weave together for us a picture of the king, who his people are under the king and how we all live together in the presence of God.

How that longing, perseverance, provision, trust, faith inform our minds and hearts as we come to Psalm 24. Well, we won't be picking up all of those themes this evening, but as you reflect on the psalms, I'd encourage you just to have an eye out for how the psalms weave together a picture for us of God and people in the world to which he calls us to live.

Second thing to note as we dig in is that psalms, in case you haven't noticed, are poems. They're poems. And we see in the psalms the discipline and delight of the poet's art as the words are woven together, not just thrown together, not that any of the words of Scripture are thrown together, but woven with care and sometimes in striking ways.

And we want to just pause and read a little bit slowly as we see the art and craft of the poet employed in the service of the communion of God.

[4 : 34] It reminded me as I was reflecting on this of a modern hymn writer's line, a hymn we sometimes sing, come now fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace.

I think as we attend to the poetry of the psalm, it's art and craft, we have our hearts tuned to the psalmist's key. So that's partly what we want to do tonight is spend a little time reading the psalm and then spend a little time having the psalm read us.

So that's our two-point structure for this evening's sermon. We read Psalm 24. And point two is Psalm 24 reads us.

As is sometimes the case with a few points, there's a few sub-points to go with that. That's 15 sub-points and you laugh.

Susan and I were watching a conference sermon this week and a terrific sermon. It was really helpful. And the speaker said, well, it's the end of the day. This is a hard slot to fill. So just one-point sermon this evening, 22 sub-points.

[5 : 47] And people laughed, but there were. And so there are tonight, not 22, no, just 15. But in Psalm 24, if you've got your Bible open, you can see quite readily, you can probably even see from there that it falls into three quite neat sections.

Verses one and two speak of the creator. Verses three to six speak of the creature who is also a worshiper. Verses seven to ten speak of the king.

And we often see these, commentaries often see these as three quite distinct sections. And they are distinct, but we'll want to revisit this judgment when Psalm 24 reads us.

How do these three parts of the psalm connect together? And we'll be able to make a judgment about that when we see what each part contains. So, we read Psalm 24, we start at verse one, and here's sub-point one.

God owns the world. God owns all there is. And already as we look at verse one, we see the poet's art and craft in the service of communion with God.

[7 : 04] How is it that the earth and the world are related? And if we just pause for a moment on this first line of the poem, I think we'll already get to a sense for the journey that this psalmist is taking us on.

The earth. We've heard of that before, haven't we? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth is mentioned, I've got it here, approximately 2,508 times in the Old Testament. That's very common. In fact, it's the most inclusive way of speaking of the world in which that God has made.

It's the earth. And what about the earth? It's fullness. Say the old translations, which I happen to like from time to time. Everything in it.

The earth is the Lord. So the psalmist starts by drawing the sphere of God's ownership as large as possible. What's the next line? The world and all who live in it.

[8 : 10] Now we might think, well, we've seen that already. It's in the first part. Ah, not so fast. We have a poet at work here. And in fact, the word for world is quite a special word.

It's only used 36 times. It's only used in poetry. It always refers to the ordered world in which human beings live, in which God sustains by his power.

It's the place that we inhabit that God makes for us. It's a very special place then. And it's not just everything. It's all who live in it.

It's every living being. And in fact, the way this is phrased, it's a little bit like being a citizen of the world. It's the inhabitants. It's you and me. It's the people who God has made to live in this world.

So let's just step back from verse 1 for a second. So what do we see here? The poet starts with the largest imaginable claim about what God has made and what God owns and then starts to focus in on the world that God creates for us and for his human creatures to inhabit.

[9 : 28] So we get a sense already of how the poet is starting to use this poem to focus in something about God and people.

Not all the sub-points will take that long. Some of them will be very short indeed. But we've started a journey in this case. Point 2, still in verse 1.

The Lord owns all there is. Well, we'll see a question and answer strategy emerge in the later part of the psalm. But in a sense, this first verse also answers a question.

Now, if I read it two different ways, you'll see what the questions are. Let me try it. the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Okay. That's a subtle distinction. But one question is, what does the Lord own?

[10 : 30] Well, the Lord owns the earth and everything in it. The other question is, whose is all this? All this? This is the Lord's.

And in fact, the way the psalmist sets it up, it's pretty clear that it's the second of these. Who owns all this? Do you own it? Does some alien deity own it?

Who owns this? The Lord owns this and everything it contains. Now, it might seem a subtle point just to focus our attention there.

But I think, I hope, it will bear some fruit as we read on. Point three. In verse two, he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Verse two gives us the title deeds. Why is this the Lord's? Quite simply, he made it. It's his. But we're quite used to seeing and saying these words and we might miss some of the oddity that they bring us.

[11 : 35] What kind of piece of work is this? Some of you will know the song, The Wise Men Built His House Upon the Rock.

The Wise Men Built His House Upon the Rock. What's the Lord build on? He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Now, we've got architects and builders in this congregation. I think they'd recommend to you not to use this building strategy yourself. So what does the psalmist see when he says the Lord founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters?

Well, we need to get a little sense for a world that we look out on that is not ours. I mean, we look up and we look into infinite space. We see stars, the closest star light years away.

We see and know that some of those stars are galaxies of billions of stars. And we look down and we see beyond this platform the Earth's crust, magma, tectonic plates.

[12 : 43] If we keep going in the neighborhood of New Zealand, come out the other side in more infinite space. that's not what the psalmist saw.

The psalmist saw a firmament that God had put in place and in that firmament had placed stars to be lights. Looked down and saw the Earth beneath and saw in that ground underneath it the waters of chaos that threatened human existence.

It's why we see lines like this in the Psalms. This is Psalm 29, verse 10. The Lord sits enthroned on the flood.

Why is the Lord enthroned on the flood? Because it's in setting bounds on these subterranean chaotic waters that the Earth can emerge, that there can be ordered life, that there can be agriculture, that there can be a flourishing human society.

There's dozens of passages like this in the Old Testament once we start to see them in the book of Job and in the Psalms and in Isaiah in particular. So the work of creation that entitles the Lord to ownership, this is the point in verse 2, is that it brings about the possibility of human flourishing for our lives to be lived in this world that is the Lord's for he made it.

[14 : 20] Point 4. If verses 1 and 2 say that there's an everywhere that belongs to the Lord, verse 3 says that there is a here which especially matters.

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? There isn't everywhere, but there is a here, there is a watery foundation, but there is a mountain of God.

And we as pilgrims now stand at the bottom of that mountain looking up and wondering what it is to be in the presence of God.

Point 5, still in verse 3, this assumes that the mountain of God is a place for human habitation too. And the language does suggest the journey of the pilgrim as the pilgrim goes up to Jerusalem to the house of God.

You'll remember the set of psalms that begin in Psalm 120 and go through to Psalm 134 and each one of them is called the Song of Ascents, the Song of Pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

[15 : 36] Probably the clearest of these that reflect our theme is in Psalm 122. I'll just read you a couple of verses from it. Jerusalem is built like a city closely compacted together.

That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. It's that impulse to be a pilgrim to the place of God that we see here in this verse.

But who may ascend the hill of the Lord? We see this question asked. Who can stand in his holy place? But we're going up. We're going up. Verse 4.6 if you're keeping track gives us the moral requirements fitting for the Lord's holy place.

He who has clean hands and a pure heart. That answers the question of who. The one with clean hands, a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.

Now there's two other places in the Old Testament where we read this kind of question and answer. One is in Psalm 15, just a few psalms back. If you want to read it later, the whole psalm fills out some of the things that we see in these couple of verses.

[17 : 11] Another place is in Isaiah 33, in fact. Isaiah 33 verses 14 to 16. Where again the question is asked, who can stand in this place?

God is a consuming fire. And the answer comes. And it's a remarkable answer. And again, at the risk of thinking we're going really slow here.

Let's just take a lingering look at verse 4. He who has, or just says, if I were giving you sort of my version, who may stand in his holy place, the clean handed, the pure hearted.

Very terse language. And what do we have then with hands and heart? that are clean and pure? Well, we have hands, the external, what we do.

In Hebrew thinking, the heart, not an emotive faculty, but a cognitive faculty. It's what I think with. So we have our thoughts and our deeds here, positively framed.

- [18 : 24] It's what we do with cleanness, with purity. And we might think this is a very obvious set pair, comes up everywhere.
- Well, it's pretty unusual, in fact. We see it one other place in the Psalms, Psalm 73, which, as some of you might know, is a fairly downcast song.
- I'll just read a couple of verses from it for you. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
- But as for me, my feet had almost slipped, for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Something, it seems, to this psalmist has gone wrong.
- And in verse 13, Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. In vain I have washed my hands in innocence. Echoing the words of our song, implying that if I'm leading this kind of life, there's something I should be getting back from God.
- [19 : 31] Well, there's one other place then where this language also comes in the Old Testament. There's one person of whom it is said he had clean hands and a pure heart.
- Should I have a prize? Anyone? No. No. No. No. No. No.
- Genesis 20 gives us the second story of Abraham passing off his wife as his sister. Well, she was his sister, but nonetheless, in a kind of way, we won't be going there much.
- But there's a Canaanite pagan king named Abimelech who takes Sarah into his household and God comes to him in the night and says, you're a dead man.
- you've got another man's wife. And Abimelech, that's the name of the king, says, but it was in the cleanness of my hands and the purity of my heart that I did this thing. I had integrity when I did this.
- [20 : 33] And God says in the dream of the night, I know, that's why I prevented you from doing anything wrong. It's fascinating to think that the one person in the Old Testament that has this character is a little bit like we saw in this morning's sermon, one who is not numbered among the people of God.
- But we have then in these first few words the positive side of what it is to be one fit for the presence of this God. In the next couple of lines, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false, we see again the internal and the intentions of the soul, the swearing, the speaking of the mouth.
- But in negative terms now, what is purposed towards false gods and false ends ought not to be for the person who comes into the presence of this God.
- So we see a remarkably complete picture in just this very short verse of things framed positively and negatively of our thoughts, our words, and our deeds as directed to God, our neighbor, and ourselves.
- It's a remarkably comprehensive, ethical, moral guideline in a very small compass. God, our love, and it's who can stand in the presence of God.
- [22 : 20] One who has clean hands, pure heart, does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. Point seven brings us to verse five.
- This one will receive a blessing from the Lord and vindication from God, his savior. And here we see the ends of actions, not in terms of payoff, as the psalmist of Psalm 73 began to think.
- Of course, the thing is resolved in a slightly different way in Psalm 73. But here, as it comes to be lived out in the life of this worshiper fit for the presence of God.
- I'd like to slightly tweak the translation here for us. He will receive a blessing from God. I think better put here would be he will bear. in his life.

A blessing from the Lord and vindication, that is the righteousness of God. So it's not so much that do this and you get receive payment in kind, but it's do this and your life bears in it these divine qualities of blessing and of righteousness that come for the one who is fit for the hill of the Lord and his holy place.

[23 : 41] verse 6.8 it says here, such is the generation of those who seek him, those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

And it might not strike us until we pause to see this poet at work that this is the first time in the psalm we hit a plural. It's not about a singular you or a him or a her.

It's about a them and a those. It's not just about an individual. This is the generation of those who seek the Lord.

Not only a pilgrimage undertaken by the individual, but undertaken by all those who would belong to the God of Jacob. point nine brings us to the latter part of the psalm.

Lift up your heads, O you gates. And in verses seven and verse nine, lift up your heads, O you gates. This very clear, repeated pattern.

[24 : 50] Perhaps one of the most famous or at least one of the most resonant portions of our psalm. If there's any Messiah fans here, I mean, Handel's Messiah now.

Lots of Messiah fans here. You might know that in part two of the Messiah, scene two, movement 33, these are the words that Handel uses to sing the declaration of the ascension of the resurrected Christ.

And this is the section that leads some people to believe that the words of Psalm 24 have to do with perhaps a celebration of the procession of the Ark of the Covenant into the temple, even though we have no evidence for a celebration of the procession of the Ark of the Covenant into the temple.

But it just, it has that kind of evocative language, doesn't it? Here again, we need to make the psalm just a little bit strange. lift up your heads or you gates, be lifted up your ancient doors.

We picture the port collis being flung up. Is that what you picture? Don't picture that. The gates of ancient Near Eastern cities, temples, all of them, swung on hinges, just like our doors do.

[26 : 15] I think it's kind of important to get that picture in our minds, because these gates aren't going to keep out this king. It's not a question of requesting them to be open. So what's going on when it says, lift up your heads or you gates, be lifted up your ancient doors?

Well, here in this world that God has made, there seems that there is something of human fabrication too, but personified. Lift up your heads.

It's inviting the entranceway to the king of glory to be jubilant, to be exultant, to be joyful, to be proud, because of who's going to come through those gates.

Stand tall, be exultant at the coming king. And finally, in verses 8 and 10, who is this king of glory? And we have an answer that again might strike us as a little bit surprising.

Who is this king of glory? Well, it's pretty military, in fact. The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. In fact, we could say a battle-hardened warrior for that second line.

[27 : 35] And in verse 10, who is this king of glory? The Lord Almighty, which older translations will give us as the Lord of hosts, and which we, some of us, become used to singing in Chris Tomlin's yet more literal translation of this phrase.

I know who goes before me. I know who stands behind. The God of angel armies is always by my side. This is the king of glory who's entering in.

Well, that's the ten sub points, and there is yet more that could be said, but we'll leave it there.

I hope that's been a help, just reading Psalm 24 and seeing perhaps some facets of it that we might not have contemplated before. But having read Psalm 24 and with some of those thoughts in mind, we want to let Psalm 24 read us.

You'll be glad to know we've got only five sub points now. First of all, then, I want to revisit that question we posed about the three sections of the Psalm at the beginning.

- [28 : 51] We can see them quite clearly. Creator, creature, king. But I hope you can see now how they work together to give us one interdependent picture as we start with the very foundations of God's created order.

And then work up to the world that humans inhabit. And then stand at the bottom of the mountain of God and look up. And as we look up, ask, can we go up this mountain?

And as the king comes, the cry goes out to the gates on the pinnacle of the mountain to be lifted up. And you can see that we're going up, up, up, up.

who can go up the hill of the Lord? Who can, the word isn't actually stand, I'm afraid to tell you again, it's who can arise in his holy place as if standing up from kneeling?

Who can ascend it? And then you have the gates themselves proud, exultant, rejoicing at the name, at the coming of the creator king.

- [30 : 01] I think we see one movement from bottom to top. And I think there is one other place in the, if this helps, in the Bible, where we see a dynamic like this one.

And it was when a king came into Jerusalem. In Luke's account of the triumphal entry, Jesus is being acclaimed as the coming king.

blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord. And the disciples who are saying this are rebuked.

And Jesus replies, I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out. And it's as if Psalm 24 is giving us this picture where actually the stones are crying out, the stones are standing erect at the coming king as God's people gather, to worship.

So that's, I hope, gives us a sense for the shape of this psalm and maybe starts to suggest how it claims us. So briefly, a second point.

- [31 : 10] What is the setting for this psalm? I hinted a little bit earlier that there are some speculations about where this psalm comes from. Is it part of a liturgical movement?

Is it part of a seasonal celebration? Was it used as an enthronement psalm? How was it used? And the very short answer is, we don't know.

It doesn't say. So what does the psalm tell us about itself? What's this psalm about? God? It affirms the basis on which God and people live together, quite simply.

The creator king comes to his people. Who are the people fit for the creator king? It's just one thought, really.

It affirms the basis on which God and people live together. other. So how does that claim us? Third thing, how does creation claim us?

- [32 : 19] In verses one and two. We have a very understandable tendency to think that we see in creation a powerful God and that's amazing and that's true.

But that's one of the reasons why I spent a little bit of time trying to give us another view of the universe that isn't ours. It's the view of these pre-scientific psalmists.

They look at the ordered world, the firmament above, the ground beneath, see that the world flourishes and this is the response that they have.

Fearing the God who can subdue chaos. loyal to the one who made it possible for me to live. Trust in the one who sustains the world so that life can flourish.

In fact, this is exactly Moses' logic as he's instructing the people of Israel before they enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 10. Just a couple of verses there.

- [33 : 29] Deuteronomy 10, verse 14. Moses says to the people, to the Lord your God belongs the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? So what's the corollary? What's the implication of that? He continues, Moses does, fear the Lord your God and serve him.

Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is the one you praise. He is your God who performed for you great and awesome wonders.

In a sense, that's our Psalm 24 in a nutshell. That's how it claims us. By demanding of us, if we see it, once we see it, demanding of us our loyalty, demanding of us our trust, demanding of us our obedience, obedience.

Which leads us forth to consider a little bit more this response in verses 3 to 5, the identity of the one who's able to stand on the hill of the Lord.

- [34 : 43] Now, there is one way of thinking about this question and answer that could go like this. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Well, he who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Forget it. no one can stand in the hill of the Lord. I understand that reading, but I don't think that's what the psalmist wants us to see here.

I don't think that's what Psalm 15 wants us to see. That's not what Isaiah 33 wants us to see. Unless this seemed like an Old Testament thing, let me just point to the one place in the New Testament where this language comes together in quite a striking way.

we pointed out the hands and heart in Psalm 73 and in this pagan king. Well, there's one hands and heart passage in the New Testament and it's in James chapter 4 and I'll just read you the key bit.

James chapter 4 at verse 8. Come near to God and he will come near to you. In a sense, that's our psalm.

- [36 : 02] The creator king comes to his people. Who are the people fit for the creator king? Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners.

Purify your hearts, you double minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning, your joy to gloom. humble yourselves before the Lord.

He will lift you up. That's Psalm 24 quite neatly. Wash your hands, purify your hearts, and remember that Pastor James is writing to churches, is writing to Christians with these words.

And he's elaborating here on how friendship with the world is enmity with God in terms that very much resonate with Psalm 24.

So the question of Psalm 24 3, who may ascend the hill of the Lord, invites us then to test ourselves what has been my response to the creator king?

- [37 : 13] Have I responded to the creator king? And because this isn't just a me thing, it's the generation of those who seek the Lord, have we, have we responded rightly to the creator king?

Which brings me to point 5. So is Jesus then in this psalm? Well, I think he is. Perhaps not at the point where we might first have thought.

The God of salvation comes up in verse 5. And again, we didn't pause at every word. You might have felt we did. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?

This person, verse 4. Verse 5, he will bear a blessing from the Lord and vindication from God, his savior. savior. Savior.

What is there that needs saving here for one who is fit to stand in God's presence? Well, as we read these with Christian eyes, we see that Christ is the one in whom all God's promises, God's covenant, the arrangements that God made with his people Israel, find their yes in Jesus.

[38 : 49] It's through Jesus being the victorious king that all God's promises find their yes. How it is that divine righteousness, divine blessing can be ours from the savior God.

I think in some ways we're back at this morning's sermon. sermon for those of you who were here. Andy Hunter was speaking of Jesus teaching in Luke 11, finished with these words.

Blessed, blessed, are those who hear the word of God and keep it, heed it, attend to it, obey it.

the creator king comes for his people. Are his people fit for the presence of the creator king?

Clearly, then, there's a strong claim on those of us who identify ourselves as God's people and who seek to live as those fit for the presence of the creator king.

[39 : 58] So we want to ask ourselves, what do my hands do? What lengths do they click? What beverages do they reach for?

How readily do they form fists? What does my heart seek? To be a voyeur, do I want to win the argument?

Do I simply want to live an untroubled life? Chill. Do I just want to adore my personal idols?

Pure hands, clean heart, do not swear by what is false, do not lift up your heart to idols. And this is why we live repentant lives.

As we thought about Wednesday evening, turning away from the sins of our thoughts and words and deeds, turning to our savior king in whose life we find our lives.

[41 : 13] lives. And perhaps this evening as we gather together, there are some here who don't count themselves among the people of God.

Perhaps not, I'm not a Christian yet. And perhaps you look out of your eyes and see a world much like the psalmist did, even if now we see galaxies and the psalmists are stars.

you know that God has made this and you know God has made you. And so the psalmist is inviting you to be one of the generation who seeks the Lord, to enjoy the presence of that God by being fit to stand in his presence, by turning away from sin, seeking the savior king who made it possible for us to live a life fitting for this creator king.

Join the generation of those who seek him. Draw near to him. He will draw near to you. Let's pray.

The earth is the Lord's. We are yours, O Lord. And we pray tonight as we ponder the world you have made and the life you have called us to live in this world and with each other, that by your grace and through the work of your son, Jesus Christ, you would fit us to be the people who stand in your holy place for your glory's sake.

[43 : 00] Amen.