

Psalm 24

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Psalm 24

Vss. 1-2

- In some ways to modern, English-speaking readers, this psalm may seem a bit disjointed. But to the people of David's time it made perfect sense, for it is a processional hymn sung perhaps by a choir or by worshippers as they come into the Great Temple. The procession ascends the "hill of the Lord" and march on until the reach the gates. It is a hymn declaring the supremacy of God and how salvation is found in the worship of such a worthy God. Thus the three separate parts of the psalm represent the three parts of the procession into the Temple. It may be that the processional hymn was written for the Jewish New Year feast, Rosh Hashanah, which has strong emphasis on the Creation story and celebrates the Kingship of God.
- Part one then is a statement on the worthiness of God to be worshipped. He is the Creator so all the earth is His and as Creator all the people of the earth are His, whether they know it or not, whether they are willing to acknowledge it or not.
- The earth is the Lord's because He has created it. There is nothing or no one on earth that the Lord has not created. WE have created nothing. Anything we claim to have created already existed, we just found it and figured out ways to use it. This is what science does. The work of the empirical method is done completely within the material world of God's creation. Electricity was always there. The power of the atom was always there. Penicillin was always there. We just needed to find and unlock these things and the use them in a positive way, the way God desires. A way of peace and not destruction.
- That the Hebrews would understand God's creation as being "founded upon the seas" is curious for a desert people! But it also points to the validity of the Creation story. They understood the waters of the heavens and the waters of the earth came before the land as told in Genesis 1 and that there were then also waters below the land. It was water, not sand, that Creation was founded on.

Vss. 3-6

- If God then is worthy to be worshipped, who then is worthy to be the worshipper? Who then is worthy to approach God? Who is the true worshipper? Here Psalm 24 is very similar to Psalm 15. (read Ps. 15)
- The answer begins with a contrast. The one who is able to stand before God is the one who has clean hands and a pure heart. This however begs the question: WHO had hands so clean and a heart so pure? This is why by Jesus' time they had come to realize that the answer was "No one!". Only the High Priest one day per year could enter the Holy Of Holies in the innermost part of the Temple where it was believed that God resided and this only after a severe purification ritual. They were not wrong when they realized that Sin was causing a chasm between God and the humanity He created. And what did they understand to be the source of this Sin? Falsehood, vanity, and pride, which will ultimately lead to deceit and then to all the other Sins of human kind.
- As the procession moves forward, there would perhaps be a priest who would call the questions of vs. 3 and another who would answer back the reply of vs. 4.
- So this one who comes before God with clean hands and a pure heart will receive a blessing and will be counted a righteous.
- The answer back tells us that it is the current generation who are those who seek God, all of the house of Jacob. But this is why Jesus had to come! If the prophets are to be believed (and they are) then life in Jerusalem and in all of Israel was one of corruption and violence where the rich and powerful brutally and unjustly subjugated the poor, all the while suggesting that they are rich and powerful because THEY are those who are blessed by God and that the poor and weak are poor and weak because they are cursed by God. Look at Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers in the Temple. The House of God had become a house of thieves. Only Christ can make blood-stained hands clean again. Only Christ can make a heart polluted by sin pure again.

Vss. 7-10

- The procession moves on and stops at the gates of the Temple. Again the call and response: 7 to 8 and 9 to 10. The gates themselves become personified and seem to speak, with those behind the gates adding the voices.

- The problem is that the head of the gates, the top of the gates, is too low for such a king. In the ancient times, as a conquering general would take his victory parade, the greater the victory or the greater the general, the higher the arch under which he would enter. So the problem here, as they procession comes to the gate with either the Ark of the Covenant or something else associated with God, that the people are not capable of building a gate high enough to adequately honor God.
- Who is the King of glory? He is the Lord mighty in battle. You have this same sense in Psalm 74:12-17 (read) where from the beginning the Lord was having to fight and battle against the dragons of chaos. David knows only too well, beginning with his days as a shepherd standing between the lion and the bear who would kill his sheep, that the Lord is mighty in battle. This is what gave him confidence against Goliath and all the other foes who came in their due time. This is why we do not need to fear in the Valley of the Shadow.
- But we would be pretty dim not to understand that the gates which are not high enough are not only the ancient gates of the Temple, but also the gates of the human heart. These are the gates of calcified evil, the gates of pain, the gates of death, the gates of pride that bar the entrance of God into people's hearts. These are the bits and pieces of brick and mortar that we add to make the heads of the gates of our hearts lower and lower, making the gates smaller and smaller, doing all that we can to make sure that the King of Glory will not come in. We stay safe in our sin behind our gated hearts and we listen. And there it is like a steady drumming. And we hear that voice cry out, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice opens the door, I will come in and have communion with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).