

When Victor asked me if I would like to preach today, he said that I could choose a favourite psalm. Psalm 24 has to be one of my all-time favourites because it was the first time that I remember interacting directly with scripture and being profoundly impacted by it.

I must have been about 10, and a member of the Lenah Valley GFS group. GFS was the Girls Friendly Society, the group for girls in the Anglican Church around the world that was prominent in Tasmania in the 1950s and 60s. Anyway, there was some sort of competition between GFS groups, and one of the challenges was to recite Psalm 24. I still remember the impact that learning it had on me.

⁷ Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

I don't think that I understood much of what it was saying, but whenever I hear Psalm 24 now, I still relive the majesty of it that I experienced then – the majesty of the words and the majesty of the Lord. It was only a few weeks ago that I realised that that was where my love of declaring God's word both in public reading of scripture and in preaching must have started.

<p>¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;</p>

Or, as I remember it

24 The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

“The earth is the LORD's.” This was another thing that was foundational in my life as I did honours in Geology at Utas, and I particularly loved tectonics – the study of the major structures of the earth's crust – mountain chains, deep sea trenches, volcanoes and mid-oceanic ridges, and the forces that drive them – plate tectonics or the expanding earth. One of the key goals in my life has been to see and share how faith and science are complementary and how science shows the glory of God.

“The world, and all who live in it.” But I also realised that I didn't want to spend my life working with rocks, I wanted to work with people, so I went teaching. So, two more of my passions were contained in this verse.

But there is also a fourth. **“And everything in it.”** The whole of the earth belongs to the Lord, so that verse also contains the idea of care for his creation, another passion of mine. Certainly, I had no idea of any of this at the time, no idea of the prophetic nature of this psalm for me.

Isn't it marvellous the way the Lord speaks to us individually through his word, the Bible, from directing us in our calling in life, to how to live each day to honour him and to love those that we come in contact with.

So, if you are part of the Kids Church team here, if you lead on camps, mentor kids in music, are a teacher, counsellor or support person of any kind, or are a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle ... by birth or "honorary", be encouraged, you never know what the Lord will do with your input. I'm sure that the leaders who faithfully led our GFS group, week after week, didn't have any idea of the profound impact that that simple activity would have on my life. In fact, I only started to realise its full impact 65 years later as I was preparing this sermon.

Now, let's continue looking at Psalm 24. As we do this, I'll try to remember that a psalm is a prayer, a poem, a song – something to be lived, prayed and entered into, rather like we would experience a beautiful piece of music. So, let's explore it together and see what we can find.

<p>² for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.</p>

This reinforces the idea that God is the creator of the whole earth, bringing to mind day 3 in the creation story in Genesis¹ when God separated the land and water. So, the whole earth is the Lord's because he created it.

God is Creator and God is Holy.

<p>³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?</p>

<p>⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.</p>
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This is a psalm of David, David who did some terrible things, the worst of which may have been later than this psalm was written. But still, who can claim to have clean hands (who do only good) and a pure heart (who are in a right relationship with both God and neighbour)? Certainly not David! No one can stand before God blameless in their own strength and on their own merit.

We are all so painfully aware of our own short comings, no matter how good things might look from the outside. So, what happens?

God is Creator and He is Holy. We are not able to stand in His presence. We have a problem!

This is where our reading from Hebrews chapter 1 helps us.

¹ Genesis 1:9-13

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,
2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.
3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.
After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 1:1-3

The Lord Jesus, “who is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word”, provided purification for our sin.

Yes! God has provided the solution!

On the cross, Jesus, who was “the heir of all things and through whom the universe was created”, took our shortcomings, our guilt, our anger, our tendency to blame others, and anything else that we are or have done, said or thought that was wrong. He has taken the punishment that we deserved and given us “clean hands and a pure heart” – a new start. What a precious gift it is that he offers us.

And how do we respond to this precious gift?

Well, let’s look at the final section of Psalm 24, starting at verse 7.

7 Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty – he is the King of glory.



This psalm was probably written at and for the time that the Ark of the Covenant was being brought up to Jerusalem (1070 BC²) told in 2 Samuel 6. It had been

² What are the “gates” and “doors” in Psalm 24:7? <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/46647/what-are-the-gates-and-doors-in-psalm-247>

captured by the Philistines in battle, then returned to the Israelites because it was too uncomfortable to keep.³

The Ark of the Covenant represented God's glory and his very presence with his people.

Jerusalem was now David's capital and he was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem with great fanfare. It would have literally have been carried up the hill to Jerusalem and through an open gate. Remember David dancing "naked" before the Lord. At least that is how his wife Michal sarcastically described it. He was actually wearing an ephod, the dress of a priest, instead of his kingly robes, and he was dancing before the Lord with great abandon in a most un-kingly manner⁴.

If we think of an antiphonal or responsive reading, it gives us a visual picture of how Psalm 24 may have been recited/sung/called out. Imagine two choirs, one with the advancing procession, the other one on the city wall. The first part of the psalm was chanted by those in the procession as it wound its way towards Jerusalem. Then, when they were almost at the city

⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Then this question from those on the city wall:

⁸ Who is this King of glory?

And the answer from the choir with the procession:

The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.

And still from the procession:

⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

From the city wall:

¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?

And the answer:

The LORD Almighty –
he is the King of glory.

But, what is the meaning of "gates" and "doors" here?

³ 1 Samuel 5-7

⁴ 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 15



John Wesley’s commentary says “heads” refers to the “tops” of a portcullis-style gate, which needed to be lifted to allow people to enter.⁵

But, “lift up your heads” can also mean to take courage in times of great danger, distress or uncertainty, as in Luke 21:8 describing the end times.

²⁸When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

The Message translation for Psalm 24:7 is

Wake up, you sleepyhead city! Wake up, you sleepyhead people! King-Glory is ready to enter.

So, the gates being opened could be seen as both literal, and a call to the people of Jerusalem to welcome the Lord gladly and with enthusiasm.



It also brings to mind Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when he travelled up that same hill and entered through the same gate to fulfil the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah in the sixth century BC.

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

This king who rides in in humility on a donkey, is also righteous and victorious.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was acknowledged as the long-expected king in David’s line. “Hosanna!” “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”⁶

But, if we see Psalm 24, as well as Zechariah, as prophetic, Jesus entered Jerusalem as the very presence of God himself. This is what the Ark of the Covenant symbolised.

⁵ What are the “gates” and “doors” in Psalm 24:7? <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/46647/what-are-the-gates-and-doors-in-psalm-247>

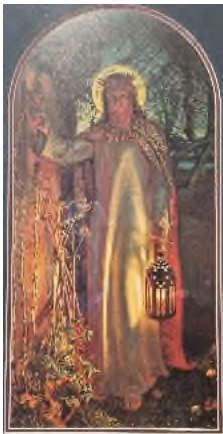
⁶ Mark 11:9, 10 NIV

He entered Jerusalem as the King of Glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.⁷ And he would soon face the greatest battle in human history.

The Enduring Word Commentary points out that “Ancient rabbinical sources tell us that, in the Jewish liturgy, Psalm 24 was always used in worship on the first day of the week. The first day of the week is our Sunday. So, putting these facts together, we may assume that these were the words being recited by the temple priests at the very time the Lord Jesus Christ mounted a donkey and ascended the rocky approach to Jerusalem.”⁸

And there is still another level to the fulfilment of Psalm 24. After his resurrection, the gates of heaven opened for the Lord Jesus Christ as he ascended into heaven to sit at God’s right hand in glory.

Wow! This is so overwhelming!



But what does this mean for us today? Firstly, personally, we have a choice to make. God longs for each of us to open the door of our heart, mind and life so that “the King of Glory may come in”. And we have the promise of the Lord Jesus that he will do just that.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.⁹

Even those of us who have been following the Lord Jesus for a long time, often need to open our hearts more fully to let him into every area of our lives.

And secondly, for us as the family of God, here at St George’s this morning? Let us welcome the Lord of Glory to come in, in all his fullness, so that we might worship him and follow him wherever he might lead us, both individually and as a community of faith.

Let’s pray. Father, we lift up the gates and open the doors of our hearts to you this morning with great eagerness. Through Jesus Christ give us clean hands and pure hearts. By the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen us as we prepare for your great celebration, and use us to reach the lost, lonely and broken. We pray in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who now sits at your right hand in glory. Amen.

Illustrations

David dancing – 2 Samuel 6: Lessons on True Worship from David’s Return of the Ark to the Tabernacle

<https://inspiredscripture.com/bible-studies/2-samuel-6#gsc.tab=0>

Portcullis – A verse and a thought: Psalm 24:7 – “Open up the gates...of your heart”, <https://www.bernielutchman.com/2018/03/a-verse-and-thought-psalm-247-open-up.html>

Jesus’ Triumphant Entry – *Jesus, The Friend of Children*, David Cook, Illustrated by Richard and Frances Hook, David C Cook Publishing, 1969 (out of print)

“The Light of the World” by William Holman Hunt, 1853, copy at St George’s Battery Point. See also <https://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/chapel/light-of-the-world/>

⁷ Psalm 24:8

⁸ Psalm 24 – The Great and Sovereign God, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-24/> (quoting Boice)

⁹ Revelation 3:20