

“The King of Glory”
Psalm 24
April 2, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

On Palm Sunday we remember the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem as Israel’s true King. He comes to bring true and lasting peace, which is why he comes on a donkey and not a war horse. The Old Testament is full of the imagery of God as Israel’s King, and Psalm 24 is a great example of that. This psalm is puzzling because it appears at first glance to lack a unifying theme. While it has three clear divisions, it is difficult to see their relationship to one another. The first two verses speak of God’s work at creation, the middle verses of those who are qualified to worship God, and the final verses of celebration at God’s coming in triumph to the temple. The unifying theme of these three sections becomes apparent at the beginning of the psalm as it speaks of God’s act of creation in bringing order out of chaos. That is what our King does and what we celebrate on Palm Sunday and every day.

The events of the past week have been a painful reminder once again of the chaos and disorder of our fallen world. Three nine-year old children lost their lives while doing the normal thing for children everywhere—just sitting in a school classroom with their friends. Three families were forever changed by the violence of that day, including the pastor of the church, whose daughter was among those who lost their lives. The surviving children were also thrown into chaos, as their attitude toward a place where they had felt safe was also significantly harmed. Three adults who had given themselves to the development of children were also lost that day. And let’s not forget the chaos in the life of the shooter, a woman experiencing gender dysphoria. Or what about the family of the shooter and what they must be feeling. And then there are schoolchildren and their parents throughout our nation who experience to varying degrees some disorder and chaos as a result of this.

Who will restore order? Who will bring calm to such a chaotic, sin-wracked world? It is this one who comes riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Even his choice of a mount that day demonstrates his calming power over chaos. In his gospel, Mark tells us that Jesus rode on a colt **“on which no one has ever sat”** (11:2). My brothers and I had horses growing up, and the one I rode the most was half wild and half broken when we got him. Riding him was quite the adventure. But Jesus was able to calm his unbroken mount in the challenging environment of riding through a crowd of shouting people. He is the King who brings order out of chaos, and that is the theme developed in Psalm 24.

I. Bringing Order at Creation – v. 1-2

The opening verses of our psalm declare that ownership of this world belongs to God. **“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”** Our planet and everything on it belong to God. It is not ours to exploit as we see fit, but ours to steward for God’s benefit. Verse 2 gives the basis for this claim. The earth is God’s by right of creation. **“For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”**

This language about creation sounds a little strange to us, but it is worded this way to remind us of the first two verses of the Bible. **“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”** This is describing what was present before the first day of creation. It was without form and void, a phrase Old Testament scholars understand to mean chaotic and disordered. The “deep” refers to deep waters. In the ancient Near East, the sea was seen as a metaphor for chaos and uncontrollable forces. The Spirit of God was hovering over these waters, like a mother bird hovering over her young. God’s hovering over the deep waters brings order out of chaos. The six days of creation describe the order brought by God. Even the activity of the six days is orderly. On days 1-3 God creates the realms of light, sky, seas and land, while on days four through six he creates the inhabitants who fill those realms.

The message the psalmist is reminding us of in these opening verses is that our God brings order out of chaos. As Genesis 3 will show, sin disrupts that order and throws the world again into chaos. The ten plagues that God brought to Egypt through Moses illustrates this. As Pharaoh hardens his heart to God’s word, the land of Egypt begins to descend back into the chaos of Genesis 1:2. God is able to tame the chaos and disorder of the physical world, but can he tame the chaos of our lives? The next section of Psalm 24 answers that question.

II. Restoring Order Through Worship – v. 3-6

These middle verses are an Old Testament description of worship. The **“hill of the Lord”** is Mt. Zion where the temple was located. Since it was located at a high point in Jerusalem, one had to ascend to get there. The meaning is both literal and figurative, since true worship requires a fight with the gravitational pull of being self-focused instead of God-focused. It is like ascending a hill. Verse 3 asks, “Who is qualified to worship at God’s temple?” Verse 4 then begins to answer the question, beginning with **“clean hands and a pure heart.”** The clean hands speak of one’s actions, while the pure heart refers to a person’s thoughts. In other words, there is a basic level of moral integrity with this worshiper. The categories of chaos and order are here transferred to the moral realm of good and evil.

This worshiper **“does not lift up his soul to what is false.”** This is a phrase that means a refusal to worship idols. The next chapter makes clear the meaning of the lifting up of the soul when it equates it to trusting God. **“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust”** (Ps. 25:1-2). He doesn't trust in that which is false, which is referring to idols. They are false in promising deliverance and help but not being able to deliver on any of their promises. Our current idols include such things as popularity, money, safety, appearance, and much more. These things are all gifts from God, but we trust in the Giver and not the gift.

The last phrase of verse 4 says that this true worshiper **“does not swear deceitfully.”** It means simply to make a solemn oath, a promise to God, and fail to keep it. How much chaos comes to life simply because we fail to be honest people? Honesty, which always starts with honesty before God, is a way to restore order to life.

The promise given to this worshiper is given in verse 5. **“He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”** The blessing received is the blessing of righteousness. This word takes us back again to the restoration of order in the place of chaos. If the arena is the divine courtroom where judgment is pronounced by God, the verdict will be one of acquittal. If the arena is one's character, the righteousness is honesty. If in the arena of life as a whole, the righteousness takes the form of success.

Is your life marked by some degree of chaos right now? Maybe you feel like the wheels are coming off your life and things just aren't working out. Or perhaps you're just overwhelmed with busyness, but, to quote a famous saying, “The hurrier you go the behinder you get.” The restoration of order in your life is grounded in worship. It is the message Jesus gave to Martha when she resented the lack of help being given to her by her sister, Mary. Martha was busily engaged in the challenge of preparing a meal for Jesus and his disciples, while Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him. Martha wanted Jesus to force Mary to come help her, and Jesus refused, endorsing instead Mary's choice. Jesus knows that the restoration of order in our lives doesn't come through greater efficiency or harder work, but through the worship of and submission to him.

Verse 7 gives us the essence of this worship. It is to **“seek the face of the God of Jacob.”** Verse 1 told us that everything in this world, including all its treasures of money, health and talent, belong to the Lord. But verse 7 tells us what the greatest treasure is. God's face, not the gifts of his hands, is the greatest this life has to offer. The face of God speaks to the essence of who he is, just as it does for us. If I see a photograph of you, it contains your face. If someone takes a photo of my arm, my wife might recognize it as my arm. But she would say, “That looks like my husband's arm.” She would not say, “That's

my husband” unless the photo showed my face. The greatest joy for God’s people, and the thing that restores order to our lives, is the enjoyment of face-to-face intimacy with God.

Notice that it is the face **“of the God of Jacob”** that we are told to seek. Why not the God of Abraham or some other significant Old Testament person? This particular title for God draws attention to the grace of God. Though Jacob was a cheater, schemer and liar, God pursued him for decades until that defining moment on the banks of Jabbok when God wrestled with Jacob. The grace of God found him, and God changed his name from Jacob, which means supplanter or deceiver, to Israel, which means “he strives with God.” Jacob saw the face of God there and found it to be a smiling face full of grace. This becomes the foundation for all our worship, the worship that brings order out of our chaos.

III. Establishing Order Through Warfare – v. 7-10

Many psalms have both an historical reference and a future fulfillment in the ministry of Christ, and this is clearly one of those. King David wrote this psalm in all likelihood on the occasion of moving the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). That’s when he danced before the Lord as the Ark, which was the very presence of God, was placed in the tent. Jesus taught that these psalms all speak of him (Luke 24). When we understand that he is the presence of God, it is easy to see how this psalm speaks of his enthronement in heaven. As we say in the Apostle’s Creed, “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” That seat, the Bible tells us, is a throne from which he rules.

So verses 7-10 of our psalm tell us something no human has witnessed—the arrival of Jesus in heaven after his resurrection. We have abundant eyewitness testimony to the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. You can read those eyewitness testimonies in the four Gospels. We also have eyewitness testimony to Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Luke tells us that the apostles all saw Jesus ascend (Acts 1:9). But none of them, nor any other human, witnessed his arrival in heaven.

The arrival is described in the form of a dialogue between the gates of heaven and the angels of heaven. The angels speak first, telling the gates to lift up their heads that the King of glory may come in. When humans are told to hold their heads high, it means to be filled with confidence and a healthy pride. It is the opposite of being downcast, in which the dejected head is lowered. A person holds their head high at a moment of triumph. The gates of heaven are personified and informed of the fact that it is time to rejoice at a triumph. Gates see many pass through them, and these gates are no exception. They had witnessed the mission of many angels going forth at the command of God

in various efforts to restore this very broken and fallen world. The gates had witnessed the angel Gabriel going with his astounding announcement that a virgin would be with child. And they had witnessed the even more astounding departure of the Son of God some 34 years prior to this, leaving the glories of heaven for a life of suffering and poverty. In many ways, all of this going and coming witnessed by these gates had the smell of defeat about them. But now it would seem something different is about to happen.

The gates respond with a question. **“Who is this King of glory?”** The answer is given: **“The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle!”** It is none other than the Son of God, the very same one the gates had seen leave over three decades before this. He left to take the form of a weak baby, to live a life of weakness and to die a shameful death. But he has been raised from the dead and is now returning as a conquering warrior. The book of Revelation says that the blood of battle is still on him as he passes through these gates, but he is returning victorious. His mission was to restore what was broken in this fallen world, to crush Satan and break his tyranny over the earth, to end death and to make all things new. He returns to heaven as a victorious conqueror in every part of his mission.

When there is a significant victory, those who benefit from it love to prolong the celebration. They want it to be repeated so it can be enjoyed and relished all over again. So the dialogue is repeated all over again. We football fans understand this. Whenever our team has a big victory, we want to see it again so that we might enjoy it all over again. The book of Revelation says that the heavenly celebration continues still. The twenty-four elders worship God saying, **“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign”** (11:17). And again, the great multitude in heaven, **“like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns’** (19:6).

CONCLUSION:

Jesus rides into Jerusalem to restore order in the midst of the chaos of sin. The one who brought order at creation is the same one who can bring order back to this sin-drunk world and to each of our lives. He does so on Palm Sunday not by riding a war horse, but on the colt of a donkey, a symbol in this day that a king was coming in peace and not to make war. This was his mount because he was coming to bring peace in our relationship to God by dying in our place and being raised for our life. Let us worship him today!

Small Group Discussion Questions
Psalm 24

1. Is there a story from your life where God turned chaos into order?
2. The last four verses of Psalm 24 describe Jesus' arrival in heaven after his ascension. He is described as a victorious warrior returning home (with blood still on his garments according to Revelation 19:13). What are some of the victories Jesus won prior to this? Are there any feelings or desires that stir inside of you when you think of Jesus in this way?
3. When we think about the present reign of Jesus, what are some of the errors countered by this idea?
4. Let's try to make this more personal. When you think of the current reign of Jesus and of his committed and faithful love to you, as well as his promise to keep you and protect you, what should be the result in your life of believing these things? How might you have failed to believe this?
5. Jesus' victory is a victory for the earth. The earth and its fullness belong to him. Are there implications this has for a Christian environmentalism?
6. The greatest gift God has for us is face-to-face intimacy with God himself (v. 6). Do you believe that? How might your life be different if you believed that more strongly?
7. The Christian life is a pilgrimage marked by ascent, by climbing (v. 3). Do you see any implications that has for your Christian life? Or to word that differently, what troubles arise from failing to believe that?
8. Blessing is promised to the one who "does not lift up his soul to what is false" (v. 4). That is referring to idolatry. What idols pose unique and powerful temptations to you?