



## Exalted: The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #26

Psalm 24

David Sunday

April 1, 2012

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Hosanna, hosanna  
Hosanna in the highest  
Hosanna, hosanna  
Hosanna in the highest!

Am I the only one who had a hard time staying seated through that song? Come have your way among us, Lord. We welcome You here, Lord Jesus.

Let's turn Psalm 24 in to His Word. We've been looking at three psalms this past month.

- In Psalm 22, we see Jesus, our Savior dying on the cross
- In Psalm 23, we see Jesus, our Shepherd leading us with His Shepherd's crook
- Now in Psalm 24, we see Jesus, our Sovereign King of glory and grace, crowned in glory

Or we could summarize it like this:

- Psalm 22—the psalm of our Savior's cross
- Psalm 23—the psalm of our Shepherd's crook
- Psalm 24—the psalm of our Savior's crown

Psalm 24 divides into three stanzas: verses 1-2, 3-6 and 7-10 from which we will focus on three points. Next month, many of you students will be facing exams. One of the things I most appreciated in a teacher was when he would let us know the questions in advance. It didn't happen very often but I felt like no matter how hard the exam was, if I knew the questions that would be on it, then I could prepare adequately for it.

There's coming a day—and I don't know when it will be—when each of us will stand in God's presence and face the final exam of our lifetime. This exam will determine whether or not we will live forever in our Savior's presence—in the presence of His glory and grace—or whether we will live forever cast away from His presence into outer darkness

where Jesus said there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 13:27-28). It's absolutely urgent that we prepare for this final exam!

This psalm helps us prepare to meet the entrance requirements. This is a psalm for people who want to know they are ready to face God's examination. It's for people who want to live in God's gracious presence now and for eternity. The psalm is largely an answer to two questions that are raised in verse three:

1. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
2. Who shall stand in His holy place?

It's a psalm for people who want to get as close to God as they can and who want to stay there—stand there—near to Him in this lifetime and in the life to come. What does God require of those who would draw near to Him? How can we prepare to meet Him? This psalm helps us answer these questions.

## **1. God Establishes His Right to Examine Us -- Verses 1-2**

God is establishing His right to examine all of us. Some people approach an exam asking, "What right does the teacher have to give us this test?" God has the right to examine us because verse one says, "*The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein...*" He made the world out of nothing. He fills the earth. It was full at creation; it continues to be full this day. The seas have not run out of water though many, many clouds have ascended from those seas. The air has not expired though billions of people are breathing it right now. The soil has not run out of nourishment even though trillions of plants derive their nourishment from it.

"*The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof...*" He keeps it full of life and it all belongs to Him, so does everyone who dwells on this earth. We are God's tenants here. We borrow life from Him. We depend on Him for every breath we take and every step we take. Were God to remove His sustaining hand from us for even a moment, all of us would perish. Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus sustains the universe by the word of His power. Were the Lord Jesus Christ for a moment to cease His sustaining of this universe, it would fall back into nothingness.

"*The earth is the LORD's...*" He fills it. He gives it life. He gives life to everyone on the earth. He sustains that life and one day, each one of us will need to answer to Him.

One of the questions that we will face when we stand before Him is, “How have you responded to God’s authority over you?”

He made the world for you to live in. *“He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”* He separated the waters from the dry land so that you can live here on His green earth. It’s only because of His power that those waters have not covered all the land that we know.

How have you lived before Him? How have you responded to His sovereign authority over your life? Have you lived in such a way to bring glory to Him? That is the reason for our creation.

*“Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created.”*

(Revelation 4:11).

Everything was created for His pleasure and His glory. Has your heart been filled with thankfulness to the Lord for all His bounty to you? Thankfulness kills pride and makes us happy. Grateful people are glad people. Miserable people are often unthankful. Have you been thankful to the Lord? Have you taken the life He has given you and used it for His glory or have you squandered His gifts? Do you live your life for your own pleasure? Have you defied His authority and opposed His will for your life? These are the kinds of questions we will face when we stand before our Creator. And He has the right to ask us those questions.

Abraham Kuyper, the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, said it very memorably: “There is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, Who is sovereign over all, does not cry out ‘It is Mine.’” That’s what God says about your life and about mine. We belong to Him. He has the right to examine us.

Sometimes I’ve seen students face an exam with an arrogant attitude. They say, “This is stupid. I shouldn’t have to take this test.” They don’t prepare for it and their grade often reflects that attitude. Tragically that’s how many people face the prospect of God’s final examination—as if we have no accountability to the One Who created us and gave us every breath we take. Don’t let that folly characterize you. Surrender to His sovereignty. Acknowledge His rightful authority over your life. Bow your knee to Him in grateful

worship. Yield to Him all you are and all you have because it all belongs to Him. That's the message of verses one and two.

One of the ways you can tell whether or not you acknowledge and know the sovereign God is if you want to know Him better. There's something magnetic about worship. The closer you get to His majesty, the more you're drawn in. Those who know God, desire God. Those who are preparing to meet God are pursuing God in this lifetime. Those who see the glory of God savor that glory and want to know Him better. It's impossible to know the God Whose glory fills the earth and not find your heart on a quest to know Him better. That leads us to the second stanza.

## **2. God Announces His Entrance Requirements -- Verses 3-6**

God, Who has established His right to examine us in verses one and two, now announces His entrance requirements. He begins with two questions: "*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place?*" We're not sure what historical occasion generated this psalm but it could have been the time in King David's life when after the Ark of the Covenant was brought back to Jerusalem after having been in the hands of Philistines and away from Jerusalem for two decades (1 Samuel 7:2; 2 Samuel 6). The Ark of the Covenant was where God's presence was most potently concentrated on earth at that time. It was brought back to Jerusalem in a triumphal procession and David was rejoicing. Remember how he danced before that Ark? As they were about to bring the Ark to its final resting place on Mt. Zion, the hill of the Lord, David and his colleagues stood back. "Who can stand there? Who can ascend that holy hill?"

An uphill climb is implied. God dwells in the towering heights. The places of His majesty are rarefied atmosphere. Not everyone can ascend up there into His holy presence. Whose eyes can see the King of Glory in all His beauty and behold His majesty? Who can stand there? To stand implies being settled there; to have a permanent residence there; to be accepted there.

You know the psalmist says in Psalm 103:30, "*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities [keep a record of sins], O Lord, who could stand?*" We fall flat on our faces in His presence. The answer is fourfold in verse four. God announces His entrance requirements. Here's what it takes to come into God's holy presence.

You need to have "*clean hands and a pure heart...*" That's referring to outward piety or godliness as well as inward piety and godliness. There must be a consistency here.

Clean hands refer to what you touch and handle and do—your actions. It's not enough just to come to church and sing songs and say, "I worshiped God this week." The question is, "Did you live a life of worship the other six days?" Your life must demonstrate that you worship the living God.

Remember Uzzah in 2 Samuel? When they were carrying the Ark, he touched it with his hands and died on the spot. He thought his hands, for some reason, were cleaner than the dirt on the ground but they weren't. He did not have clean hands. It is possible to have clean hands where everyone sees you as a morally impeccable person and a very righteous person but you don't have a pure heart. Your motives are filthy. God says, "You must have clean hands—outward piety and inward piety—**and** your heart must love what is holy and hate what is wicked. You must love righteousness and hate sin. You must be pure in heart." God is seeking those whose hearts are undividedly focused on one thing—the glory of God. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8). Remember Pilate? He cleansed his hands (Matthew 27:24) but his heart was not pure.

So God says through David in verse four that if we are to come into God's presence we need this outward and inward piety. Then, He says we need to have a right relationship with God and right relationship with our fellow man. Look at the middle of verse four: "*...who does not lift up his soul to what is false...*"

To lift up your soul is to put your trust in something; to look to something for your satisfaction, security, power, provision. The only One to Whom we should lift up our souls, the only One Who is worthy of our trust, the only One to Whom we should look for security, power and provision is the One true and living God. That's why the next psalm (25) begins with these words: "*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust...*" The one who comes into God's presence must not be lifting up his soul to things that are false, empty or vain. He must not be looking to the things of this world to provide his satisfaction and security for to do so is idolatry.

Not only must he have this right relationship with God, he must have a right relationship with his fellow man. He "*...does not swear deceitfully*" (Psalm 24:4). His word is trustworthy. He is honest and truthful in all his ways. He keeps his oath even when it hurts, Psalm 15 says.

Often idolatry before God breeds dishonesty before our fellow man. When we're lifting up our souls to what is false, we're also willing to speak falsehood to others. You cannot have fellowship with the God of truth unless you hate every false way.

As we look at these entrance requirements, we see that God is going to completely exam us—our actions, our attitudes, our motives, our thoughts, our words, our relationship to Him, our relationship to one another. Everything about us will be naked and exposed before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give an account. God's looking for a person of humility and sincerity and truth. A person who not only says, "I have faith" but whose life demonstrates it.

I think David is saying something very similar to the Apostle James here. "You have faith? Show me your faith by your works. Prove the genuineness of your faith by the way you live" (James 2:18). When we face God's final examination, He will be looking for things like this:

- Have you been transformed by God's grace through faith?
- Has the grace that amazed you been a grace that has transformed your life?
- Has it shown up in the way you speak?
- Has it changed your worship?
- Has it made you a person of truth and trustworthiness?
- Has it purified your heart?

Those are the kind of things that God will look for.

It's no wonder that I heard a preacher suggest this: "If you're really thinking clearly, the first step to ascend the mountain of the Lord will be a step backward." You approach that holy hill and you tremble before His holiness. You step back and fall on your face and say, "I'm not worthy. Looking at my life, I'm not sure I'm qualified to go there into His holy presence."

Verse four makes two things abundantly clear. First, I cannot be saved without holiness. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord." But I also see from verse four that I cannot be saved by my own holiness because I don't have it in me. I don't measure up completely to this requirement so when verse five talks about blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of my salvation, in order for that blessing and righteousness to come to me, I am completely dependent on the grace of God.

That's why in verse six these are the people who seek His face. They look to Him. They say to Him in the words of St. Augustine, "Oh God, command what You will but give what You command." God, You can ask whatever You demand of me but Lord, would You work in me that which You demand. Lord, You say that I must be holy—would You save me from my unholiness and baptize me into Your holiness.

We need the God salvation—do you see that in verse five? You receive righteousness from the God of your salvation. He takes you out of your unholiness and baptizes you into His Holy Spirit and He works in you that which He requires of you.

The holy living that ensures God's blessing is itself a blessing from the Lord. It's a fruit of His Spirit Who dwells in you. It's from Him and to Him and through Him.

There are two words in verse six that really encourage me. The word *generation* implies that there will be a multitude of people who will be saved by God and who will ascend into His holy place and dwell in His presence. And the word *Jacob*—"the God of Jacob." Who was Jacob? He was a deceiver. Jacob in himself did not meet the requirements of verse four but God, by His grace, did a transforming work in Jacob so that God was not ashamed to call Himself the God of Jacob. That encourages me because if He's the God of Jacob, He can be the God of David and the God of each one of us.

I want you to turn in the New Testament to the book of James. Before we move on to the last stanza, let's look at one other passage—James 4:8-10. Because this middle stanza—Psalm 24:3-6—reminds us very poignantly of these verses in James 4 which is addressing the same question: "How do you draw near to God? How do you get into God's presence and stay there? How do you get close to God?"

Listen to how God answers in James 4:8-10: "*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*" What does it look like to be drawing near to God? Well, here's what it looks like: "*Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*"

You want to draw near to God? Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts. Remove your double-mindedness. Not being double-minded speaks of not lifting up your soul to what is false. It speaks of being truthful.

Mourn over your sinful condition (James 4:9): "*Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning...*" Stop going through life all giddy all the time. Get serious in the presence of God. Realize you must come before Him one day and prepare yourself now. Turn off the TV. Stop being titillated by all the world's pleasures. Bow before God and repent. "*Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*"

You see, I cannot be lifted up until I've been laid low. I cannot be exalted until I'm humiliated in God's presence and that's why seasons of great spiritual revival have often been preceded by seasons of great spiritual repentance. We must be laid low before we can be lifted up. We must be humbled before we can be exalted.

This reminded me of the 1907 revival in Korea when God's Spirit moved in a remarkable way in that land. Listen to one testimony:

"The evening meeting connected with a Bible conference began January 6, 1907 in the Central Church of Pyongyang with more than 1,500 men present. After a short sermon, man after man would rise, confess his sin, break down and weep and then throw himself on the floor and beat the floor with his fists in a perfect agony of conviction. Sometimes after a confession, the whole audience would break out in audible prayer and the affect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together an audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out into uncontrollable weeping and we would all weep together. We couldn't help it. So the meeting went on until 2:00 a.m. with confession and weeping and praying. We had prayed to God for an outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the people and it had come. And the first evidence of it was deep humiliation."

Repentance. Why? We want to go into the presence of the Lord but our hands are filthy. Our hearts are impure. Our souls have been lifted up to what is false and we've spoken deceitfully. We need to repent.

I wonder, would it hurt any of us to experience something like what I just read in our lifetime? Could it be that our ascent into communion with God is being blocked—hindered—by the baggage of sin that we're carrying? We can't climb any higher because we're too laden down with our sin; with our love of this world. Could it be that God has greater heights of fellowship with Him to enjoy—even as a church—but we cannot enter into that fellowship unless we're willing first to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts as we draw near to God?

Verses three through six are heart searching. They probe us. We need to pause here. We need to ponder here. Am I part of the generation of those who seek Him? Am I "*seeking the face of the God of Jacob*"? I'm so thankful the psalm does not end at verse six because if it did, I think I might be looking inwardly too long. I don't want you to get me wrong—we need to do that. Self-examination is good but if I get stuck in self-examination, I might find my feet sinking into the quicksand of despair. I might start asking myself questions like, "Are my hands clean enough? Has my heart been purified from all sin? Have I completely concentrated the attention of my soul on a holy God so that I don't ever lift up my soul to what is false? Is there any deceit or guile in me?"

As I ask myself those questions, I find myself sinking into an abyss that has no bottom because that's what my heart is like by nature. You see, my present state of

sanctification is an insecure basis for assurance before God. I should look and see evidences of the Spirit of God at work in me and rejoice in that and be concerned if I don't see that, but I cannot see the work of God's Spirit in me clear enough to make that the basis of my assurance. I need something—Someone—outside of me; Someone to Whom I can look Who gives me assurance that God will accept me in spite of the sins I still see in me.

That's what verse seven is doing. It commanding me: "You've looked at yourself. Now avert your gaze away from yourself on to Someone else. Someone Who absolutely has clean hands and a pure heart. Someone Who has never lifted up His soul to what is false and has never sworn deceitfully. Look to Him."

*"Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin."*

(Before The Throne of God Above by Charitie L. Bancroft and William B. Bradbury, 1863)

### **3. Heaven Celebrates the Victory -- Verses 7-10**

Stanza three. Heaven celebrates the victory of the One Who is qualified to bring us to heaven. There is One Who has met the entrance requirements. There is One Who has ascended the hill of the Lord and stood in His holy place. He has stood there on our behalf as our Representative, as our Forerunner. We're eavesdropping on heaven here as it celebrates the triumphal entry of Christ the Victorious King. He has fought the enemies of His people; He has emerged victorious on their behalf and now He is being welcomed back through its gates. Here finally is One Who is qualified to ascend the hill of the Lord and to stand in His presence.

Did you know that this psalm was part of the weekly liturgy of Jewish worship? This psalm was assigned to be read on the first day of the week which is what? Sunday—the first day of the week. So on Palm Sunday, our Lord Jesus Christ mounted a donkey and ascended the rocky hill into Jerusalem. People outside those walls were exclaiming, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matthew 21:9). As they were saying that on the outside, inside the temple, the priests were reading these words. They were saying as the Son of God was coming into their city,

*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.  
Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory!*

But before Jesus, our Lord and Savior, could ascend that holy hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place, He first had to ascend another hill. A gruesome hill. A place of sin and shame called Golgotha—the place of the skull.

Lifted up was He to die there so that there on that cross, He—the King of Glory, strong and mighty—could do battle against our greatest foes, against sin, against Satan, against death itself. As He was lifted up there to die, His blood was poured out. That blood was poured out so our wretched hands could be cleansed and our filthy hearts could be purified. So that He—the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)—could forge a path for us who have lifted up our souls to what is false and have sworn deceitfully. So that we can now follow in His blood-stained footprints all the way into the most holy place itself.

On that cross, Jesus wrestled with death itself and He strangled it. Even as death was dragging Him down to the grave, He never let go of His grip on death and He emerged victorious from the grave. Death no longer has a hold on Him. Sin cannot destroy those who belong to Him.

What we read in Psalm 24 is the magnificent symphony in heaven, resounded by the angels of heaven when our Savior, now triumphant from the grave, finally entered into its gates.

Death is crushed to death;  
Life is mine to live,  
Won through Your selfless love.  
This, the pow'r of the cross:  
Son of God—slain for us.  
What a love! What a cost!  
We stand forgiven at the cross.

(The Power of the Cross by Keith Getty)

Angels marvel at these things. They see the King of Glory approaching, now robed in our humanity, stained with our blood. His hands pierced, His brow having been crowned with thorns. They look at Him and they say, “Who is this? Who is this at heaven’s gates?”

As He comes there to offer Himself without blemish to God in the most holy place, the angels start to sing this antiphonal chorus. We experienced this recently when the

Union University's choir was here. Half of the choir stood on the left side of the sanctuary; half on the other side, singing back and forth to one another. This heavenly choir in Psalm 24 starts with a voice on Jesus' side:

*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*

A voice from within the gates calls back:  
*Who is this King of glory?*

The first side answers:  
*The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle!*

They're still marveling on the inside, so they say:  
*Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.*  
*Who is this King of glory?*

As the gates open, all of a sudden all of heaven cries out in unison—thousands upon thousands, ten thousands upon ten thousands of voices in one accord cry out: “The LORD of hosts. The Lord, the Commander of heaven's armies, He is the King of glory! And they all worship Him, the worthy Lamb Who was slain for our sins.”

Listen friends, let's revisit that final exam. The ultimate question on that exam is the thing that you most need to get right. If you get this one right, it doesn't matter what you've gotten wrong. This question trumps them all. Maybe you have rebelled against God's sovereign authority. Maybe you have defiled your hands and made filthy your heart and lifted your soul to what is false and sworn deceitfully. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). None of us meets those entrance requirements left to ourselves. But there's a final question on this exam and God says, “You might have failed the rest of the test but get this question right and you can come in. You can enter My presence. You can stand on My holy hill. You can be with Me forever.”

Here's the question: Do you know Jesus, the King of Glory? Have you welcomed Him into your life? Do you believe in Him? Though you do not see Him now, do you rejoice in Him with joy inexpressible and full of glory?

If you do know Jesus, if He is your King of Glory, if you have welcomed Him into your heart, then you can ascend that hill of the Lord and you can stand in His holy place, faultless and with great joy because He is waiting to receive you there. He will stand there as your Advocate and will say to any voice that would accuse you, "This one is Mine. I've purchased him with My blood. He belongs to Me."

So we sing,

"Behold Him there the risen Lamb,  
My perfect spotless righteousness,  
The great unchangeable I am,  
King of glory and of grace,  
One in Himself I cannot die.  
My soul is purchased by His blood,  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ my Savior and my God!"

(Before The Throne of God Above by Charitie L. Bancroft and William B. Bradbury, 1863)

Praise God that One is worthy to enter the holy place, our Lord Jesus Christ, and He will bring with Him into God's presence all who turn from sin and trust in Him. Heaven's gates are open wide today. No one has ever said, "Put down your heads, O gates. Be shut up, O ancient doors." Heavens gates are still open wide. The question is, "Will you open wide your heart and let Him in and receive Him as your Savior and King?"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, many people let Him into the city but they didn't let Him into their hearts. Don't let that be your story this Palm Sunday. Open wide your heart. Jesus wants to come into your life, to cleanse you, to purify you and to prepare you to live in the presence of God forever. Open your heart to Him.

Let's pray:

Father, we come at the invitation of Your Word. It says therefore brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Thank You, Father, for opening the way into Your holy presence,

through the death, resurrection and life of Your Son Who sits at Your right hand. O Father, we open wide our hearts to Him today. By ourselves, we are rebels, we are sinners but You have made a way to save us through Christ. Come, have Your way among us today, we pray. Lord Jesus, we welcome You. Hosanna—save us Lord, for Your glory and our everlasting good, we pray. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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