

NOTES FROM COLIN S SMITH'S - Sunday 24th November 2024 am

TITLE: "Praying when you feel unworthy" TEXT: Psalm 24

Scripture references from the ESV

Psalm 24: The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,

² for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. ^[b] *Selah*

⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O 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, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!

In the prayer book of the Bible, each psalm is suited to a particular circumstance in life. This psalm points to a circumstance known to every Christian. It is that all too common sense of feeling unworthy when we come to pray,

The central figure in this Psalm is the LORD himself. In ten verses he is mentioned six times, and each time with the form of his name that God gave to Moses: I AM WHO I AM (**Exodus 3:14**). The psalm starts with the reminder that God owns the earth and all that is in it, including all the people. He owns it all because he is the Creator.

- 1. The question. (v3)** There is a crucial question at the heart of this psalm. Who can come near this awesome God who created the world and everything in it? After all, he is the God who formed the mountains, the oceans, and the Grand Canyon. He made the moon and the stars. He is the God who has breathed life into every human being who has ever lived. It is surely the most important question a person could ever ask.

Who shall ascend to the place where God is?

In the Old Testament, ascending the hill of the Lord would have meant climbing up to Jerusalem. However, this psalm points us higher.

Heaven is God's home.

Who shall ascend to heaven, and who can stay there?

The God who made everything is holy and his home in heaven is a holy place. That is why it is so glorious.

- God created the earth and all its beauty, but it has been ravaged by sin. The destruction of war, the ruin brought about by natural disasters and the pain of famine and disease are all effects of the curse of sin in the world.
- Heaven is a glorious place because no sin can enter there. It is a world of peace and joy where God is loved and worshipped and his will is done. There is not even a hint of sin.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

2. The answer (v4). The person who can enter the presence of a holy God must be completely pure and this is demonstrated in 4 ways:

- a) In our deeds: clean hands** refers to our deeds or actions. This person will always act with integrity.
- b) In our thoughts: a pure heart** means no impure thoughts. No one in heaven will have any impure thoughts.
- c) In our desires: to lift up your soul** to something is to desire it and to give yourself to it. That false thing is what you love and seek rather than seeking God. The pure person will not have those desires.
- d) In our words: He does not swear deceitfully** for in heaven there is no deception, no broken promises, no half-truths, no exaggeration and no lies.

We all surely recognise that none of us have lived the life of a pure person. Not only that, none of us **CAN** live a pure enough life to enter the holy presence of Almighty God in heaven. However, the Psalm does not leave us in that place.

3. The King. The second half of this psalm pictures a king entering a city. Though there are echoes of David's entry into Jerusalem when he brought back the Ark of

the Covenant, it speaks of so much more. It is a marvellous prophetic picture of Jesus Christ, the King of Glory, returning to his heavenly home.

- The King in this part of the psalm is the answer to the vital question in **v3**.
- The Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven to earth. The Son of God took flesh and became a man. He lived a perfect life, the only person in the whole of human history who has done so. His deeds, thoughts, desires and words were completely pure in the eyes of God.

Jesus engaged in a great and decisive battle against the powers of sin and death.

- He triumphed over sin by laying down his life as a sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven
- He triumphed over death by rising from the grave on the third day so that we may enjoy everlasting life

Then the Son of God, who had come from heaven, returned to heaven.

Jesus left heaven as a Spirit, for God is Spirit, but he returned in a resurrected body

As he rose into the clouds, and out of the sight of the disciples, we are given a picture of the angels accompanying him calling out for the gates of heaven to be opened for the King of Glory (**v7**). That King is the LORD, almighty God himself. The angels repeat this three times to emphasise that the one who is coming home is:

- The owner of the house – the LORD
- God the Son who left heaven, taking human flesh and becoming a man
- The one who triumphed in the battle against sin and death

The gates are opened to the King of Glory

King Jesus enters into heaven and takes his rightful place on the throne

- 4. The people (v6).** A generation is a large group of people with one thing in common, usually their age! However, in this case what this generation have in common is that they **seek him**. Who is it they seek? It is the one who is described in **vv4-5**.

They seek the LORD, Jesus Christ

All who seek the Lord Jesus Christ will receive blessings from the Lord and will be counted righteous in him (**v5**).

- Jesus is the only person who has ever truly satisfied the condition of entering heaven, but he has done this on behalf of an entire generation.

Surprisingly, David then reminds us of Jacob, who was about as far from having clean hands and a pure heart as it is possible to be. He deceived his father and cheated his brother, but Jacob's sin led him to seek after God and God blessed him. It is recorded in Genesis that God came down in the form of a man and wrestled with Jacob. Jacob's hip was put out of joint in the struggle, but he clung on, declaring **"I will not let you go unless you bless me"** (Genesis 32:26) and God did bless him (Gen32:29). That opens the door of hope for us.

The LORD, the great I AM, who created all things and who is holy, is the God of Jacob.

He redeems sinners who seek him, through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

C H Spurgeon wrote these words: *"It is possible that you are saying, 'I shall never enter into the heaven of God, for I have neither clean hands nor a pure heart.' Look then to Christ, who has already climbed the holy hill. He has entered as the Forerunner of those who trust Him. Follow in His footsteps, and repose upon His merit. He rides triumphantly into heaven, and you shall ride there too if you trust Him."*

There will be times in your life when you know your hands are not clean and your heart is not pure. There will be times when you know that you have lifted your soul to what is false and that you have deceived others with your words. What are you to do at those times? The answer in the psalm is clear:

- **Seek him (v6)**

When we sin, we face two dangers:

- **Defiance:** you harden your heart in resistance to God and say I'm not coming back. You resist every encroachment of the Spirit of God to your heart
- **Despair:** you look inward at the mess you have made and think that you cannot go anywhere near God.

These two states of mind have one thing in common. Defiance and despair keep a person from **seeking him**. Satan's objective is always to keep you as far from God and

from his redeeming grace as possible. Thus, he will tempt you to succumb to defiance so that you do not want to come to God, or to despair so that you feel you cannot come. Both stances have the same outcome.

- Watch out for this in your life and if you see defiance or despair forming in your heart, then do as the psalm tells you and **seek him**.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you (James 4:8)

How do you draw near to God when you feel unworthy?

- a) **Trust.** The answer to the question asked in **v3** is that someone has already ascended the hill of the LORD. Jesus Christ has entered the holy place and is at the right hand of the Father on your behalf. Put your trust in him. He is there precisely because your hands are not clean and your heart is not pure, and this is where you must begin. **Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.....¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, (Hebrews 4:14,16)**
- b) **Confess.** Confess what your unclean hands have done and what your thoughts have been. Confess what you have given your soul to and how you have deceived others with your words. You can do this precisely because the Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. He knows what temptation is. He is not there to condemn us but so that we will be cleansed, strengthened and wonderfully renewed.
- c) **Ask.** When you come to God and confess, there are two things to ask. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may *receive mercy* and *find grace* to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16)**
 - Ask God for mercy. There is no right to forgiveness, but God is merciful and you can ask him to be merciful to you. You can ask with confidence because Jesus died for your sins and God will show mercy to all who come in the name of his Son.
 - Ask God for grace to help in time of need. Sin is habit forming. You will be tempted again by all that you have confessed: wrong deeds, impure thoughts, wrongful desires and deceitful words. Ask for grace, remembering that the God you come to is the God of Jacob, whose power can wash the unclean hands and cleanse the impure heart. He did this for Jacob and he can do it for you.

If you truly seek him, one day you will ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy presence. The Redeemer's work in your life will be complete.

On that day your hands will be completely clean and your heart will be pure.

On that day you will lift up your soul to God alone.

On that day all your words will be praise, thanksgiving, love, triumph and joy.

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