

6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday

4/5/2020

Psalm 24

- ¹ *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. 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! Selah*

The Savior We ~~Want~~ Need: A Servant-King

All throughout the country right now, and maybe in your own homes, heads are hung low. I think of the business owner who has spent their entire life on their business. They have taken out loans. They have put in 80 hours a week for years. They have tried and failed and finally, when the economy was booming, they became truly profitable. Things were looking up! But then suddenly, everything grinds to a forcible stop. The business has to shut down.

The other day, I saw a video of a father returning home from his work at the hospital. His young son ran to him to hug his dad. The father had to quickly yell at his son to get him to stop so that he wouldn't hug him. The father had to yell at his son to not hug him. He hadn't washed yet. It wasn't safe. The father broke down by his front door because of this.

Then there are those families who are grieving. Thousands of families who are grieving. There are lot of heads facing down right now.

But, dear friends, lift up your heads. You still have joy and cause for singing. Your God is still working in you and at your side as his words fill up your heart. Lift up your heads and see the Savior we need: the Servant-King.

Our text today is our psalm, Psalm 24. This psalm has an interesting backstory. It's actually a psalm about a parade, which makes a lot of sense on Palm Sunday, when we celebrate the parade of Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem to the cheers and adulation of thousands. Psalm 24 was written by another king, King David. And it all has to do with the ark of the covenant. Yes. That ark. That one that Indiana Jones chased after.

You see, the ark of the covenant has an interesting history behind it. We don't know what happened to it eventually. That is a subject for much debate. But it is interesting to study what happened to it in the Bible. Originally it was commissioned by God to be carried by the Israelites and in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. It was filled with manna and Aaron's budding staff and the tablets of stone. But it became a sort of good luck charm later on in Israel's history. The Israelites took it to the war front with the Philistines. They thought that by bringing it to the battlefield, that God would bless them with victory. God was not pleased. God did not grant them victory.

The ark was then captured and taken to Philistine lands. But it was God's ark. And it already had a home. A plague struck the first city. And then the next. And then the next. And each time the Philistines moved their spoils of war, God followed them with a curse. Until finally, the Philistines had enough of it. And they loaded

up the ark on a wagon, pulled by two milk cows. And then watched in stunned silence as the cows pulled the ark unbidden and undirected to Israelite lands.

Years passed. Eventually David, the new king of Israel, a man after God's own heart, decided to bring that ark to Jerusalem, which Saul should have done years before. And then David the king, in a parade of thousands of people, brought the ark into Jerusalem. David himself was basically in his undergarments dancing in the streets, he was so happy that the ark was back. Yes, indeed, the whole city rejoiced.

Afterwards, David, filled with the Holy Spirit and the joy of this event, sat down and wrote Psalm 24.

But who is this psalm for? Whom does it celebrate? Is it a psalm recognizing David's excellence as the king? No. Was David riding on a victorious warhorse in that psalm and soaking up the spotlight of his citizens to celebrate his big win? No. David, the king, recognized that there was the King. David recognized that his own accomplishments meant very little before the King who is above every king.

David wrote, *"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it"* (Psalm 24:1). Who is like God? We are commanded to lift up our heads at his coming, but how dare we? Even in earthly throne rooms, people bow their heads, and avert their eyes, and pay homage to the king on the throne. How much more before the king who is above every king who reigns over it all who owns it all--from the smallest electron to the largest galaxy? How could we dare, as mere creatures, who struggle mightily with each other, lift up our heads in the presence of this king of glory?

Are your hands clean? Is your heart pure? Can you claim to have not one speck of guilt? Just a few months ago, all things were going well. Did we attribute those blessings to the giver and to him alone? Now that things have turned sour and there is so much unknown, where do we turn for help? In every situation, good or bad, we doubt God's love and kindness. Hope grows dim as if God were somehow unreliable. How dare we lift up our heads before God, the King, as if we had a right to be in his presence.

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psalm 24:3)

The only one who fits this description is Jesus. Not you. Not me. Not even David. Rather, it's the one Zechariah prophesied who ride in not on a charging warhorse,

but a meek donkey. The one who rode into Jerusalem to the praise and shouts and acclamation of men, knowing full well that it would be mere days before the cheers turned to jeers. The eternal Son of God, wrapped in our flesh and blood, come as a king, but ready to serve. Yes. He is the Savior we need. The King whom legions of angels obey and worship, but instead chose to wear our sin, our guilt, our shame, our filth. The King who rode to die for us.

How can we dare to lift up our heads and see the King of glory? Because he has cleaned us. Every one of my doubts has been paid for. Every struggle with sin has been wiped out. Every loveless word, every act of spurning those I should cherish, every time I trusted in the gift above the Giver, it has all of it been washed away from me thoroughly. I can wash my hands for hours, and there will still be a germ or two or ten thousand that populate these hands. But with Christ, his cleansing act of dying on the cross for me has wipe me so purely that God himself inspects me and says not guilty.

How dare we lift up our heads and see the King of glory? After what he has done for us, how can we not?

But how do we? Well consider Jesus and his words again. He said that he came to serve and not to be served. He came ready to die. He came with humility, wrapped in humility, not demanding that he be put on the throne of Israel, but willingly going to the cross. Consider what Paul said about Jesus in Philippians 2:7, "*he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,*" Jesus is the King over all kings, but he became the king under every king.

We lift up our heads to the king of glory today with the same attitude of humility. We approach his throne, not pretending that we are more than we are, or trying to bargain with him, or trying to claim equal terms with him. Rather, we come as beggars, knowing that we have nothing to offer.

Do you see now why David was so thrilled at the return of the ark of the covenant? David was the king of Israel now and yet, he danced like a fool in the streets. His own wife was upset with him, telling him that kings shouldn't act like that especially before servants. David responded to her, "I will celebrate before the LORD. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the [servants] of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor" (2 Sa 6:21–22). For the King of kings, David would act like a servant, for that King of kings has been a servant to all mankind.

My friends, on this Palm Sunday, let us praise the Savior we need, the servant-king. For him, there was nothing too low to do in order to save us, even dying on a cross. Let us praise him then, not only for who he is, but what he willingly did out of genuine love for us. Let us lift up our heads, open up the gates, and sing our praises to the King who served. Let us lift up our heads during these trying times because of this King who chose to die for us. Let there be joy in your hearts and homes right now because of this King over all Kings, who lives again. Amen.

God bless you. God keep you safe and healthy. God bless your Holy Week. God keep you firmly rooted in his gospel. Amen.