

Summer Psalms

“Who May Approach the King of Glory?” (Psalm 24)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on 6/23/2013

Introduction

- ❖ Turn with me to Psalm 24. To study this psalm I'd like to begin with the header. We're told this was written by David. And similar to hymns and praise songs, a psalm like this was used for corporate worship in the Jewish temple.
 - ▶ Based on historical records, we know that in Jesus' day it was traditional to sing Psalm 24 at Temple on the first day of every week (Sunday). It was a popular Jewish song, and years later Psalm 24 was adopted into the Christian tradition and regularly sung on Ascension Day, which occurs forty days after Easter Sunday.

- ❖ Now this connection between Psalm 24 and Jesus' Ascension is intriguing. **What it means is that, from early on, Christians have recognized a glimmer of the gospel in this psalm.** Without discounting its historical context, we can confidently say that Psalm 24 points to Jesus and his gospel. This is not just a psalm ready to be sung. It's a gospel text waiting to be preached. **[READ PSALM 24]**

- ❖ If you walked into a job interview, I think you'd expect the company to ask for a resume listing all your qualifications. Perhaps the job requires a technical skill or a certain amount of experience. You have to be qualified for that particular line of work or that degree program. No one takes offense to that. Meeting qualifications is just a part of life.
 - ▶ There are height qualifications for who can ride roller coasters. There are age and skill qualifications for who can drive a motorized vehicle. There are academic qualifications for who can be accepted into a university.
 - Questions like: “*Who is allowed to perform open-heart surgery? Who is allowed to design a new bridge?*” make complete sense. No one would object to such questions of qualification.

- ❖ But if I were to ask, “**Who is allowed to worship God this morning? Who is qualified to approach the King of Glory?**” Well now you might object. Why would you need qualifications to approach God? Isn't everyone automatically accepted? Are you suggesting we have to meet certain conditions before we can worship God?”
 - ▶ If that idea doesn't sit well with you, then you have to take a careful look at v3 again. “*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?*” The *hill of the Lord* here is a reference to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the *holy place* refers to the Temple itself where the worship of God happened.

- ❖ So David is basically asking, “***Who shall ascend the Temple Mount to stand before God offering sacrifices of worship?***” But to even ask this question implies that some qualifications exist. Some are able to ascend and stand before God while others are not.
 - ▶ Now granted we live in a free country where anyone and everyone is welcome any given Sunday to congregating with us, but when it comes to worshipping God in spirit and in truth, that's a different matter. **According to Psalm 24, not everyone can just come before the presence of God.** You have to be qualified. There are certain conditions you have to meet.

- ❖ Now obviously the big question is, “***What are these qualifications and have I met them?***” Psalm 24 forces us to individually ask, “*Am I qualified to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place? Am I qualified to approach the King of Glory?*” You may not see it now, but I promise that all this talk of qualifications is actually good news.
 - ▶ So stick with me. I’ve broken up our text into three sections. Vv1-2 introduce us to ***who*** it is that requires qualifications. Vv3-4 tell us ***what*** those qualifications are, and vv5-10 explain ***how*** a person can attain them.

Who is This That Requires Qualifications to Approach Him?

- ❖ To begin, consider this question, “*Who is this that requires qualifications to approach him?*” The idea that God would ask for qualifications is a hurdle for many. It doesn’t seem right. **Who is God that he can demand such things?** If we can’t answer this, instead of being good news, this psalm will sound like a conceited demand from a petty god.
 - ▶ Imagine if I required qualifications for you to approach me after service. What if I said you have to be over six feet tall, you need a PhD, and you have to speak Greek if you want to talk to me. You would think I was full of myself. ***So who is God that he can make qualifications without being guilty of complete arrogance?***
- ❖ V1 introduces us to this God. “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein*”. **Simply put, this God is Yahweh, the Sovereign Ruler over everything on the earth, including you and me.**
 - ▶ The term LORD represents the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh. So the first half of v1 confesses that the earth and everything in it belongs to Yahweh. David affirms Yahweh’s sovereign rule over all creation. The second half of v1 parallels the first, but now David’s focus narrows down to the ‘*world*’ and on humans in particular. Those who dwell therein are the Lord’s. Every person belongs to Yahweh.
- ❖ Now v2 tells us the reason why this is so. Why is the earth and everyone in it the Lord’s? Answer: “*For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*” **In other words, Yahweh derives his authority over creation by virtue of being its Creator.**
 - ▶ And so it’s this God – the Creator and Sovereign Ruler over all – who requires qualifications to approach. And he has every right to do so. **He made us, so he can set the terms and conditions necessary to be in relationship with him.**
 - And they’re not arbitrary. The conditions I made up for approaching me after service are arbitrary. But God’s qualifications have a good reason.
- ❖ **His qualifications are necessary if you want approach God – the Holy God – in safety.** For unholy creatures like us, to approach a Holy God is dangerous. It’s like why there are certain qualifications for who can approach an activated MRI machine. The machine is basically a huge, powerful magnet, so if there is any bit of metal in your body, you’re disqualified from getting close when it’s turned on. Doing so is deadly. So complain all you want about strict qualifications, but realize it’s for your safety!

- ❖ Just imagine what it's like to approach the Holy God. His holiness is like pure, white-hot fire. Instead of attracting sin like a magnet, it actually consumes sin like fire consumes stubble. So if our hearts are tainted with even the slightest trace of sin, then we're undone. If we approached the white-hot holiness of God, we'd be consumed.
 - ▶ **So there is good reason why God would demand that only qualified people ascend his holy hill and approach his holy presence.** It's for our safety. Not just anyone can approach. It's only for the qualified.

What are the Qualifications Required to Approach Him?

- ❖ That leads to a second question. *What exactly are these qualifications? If the slightest taint of unholiness would be our undoing, then the qualifications to approach must be really high!* And not surprisingly, that's what we see in vv3-4. *“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? 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.”*
 - ▶ V4 gives a list of qualifications to ascend this holy hill, but let's not read it as an exhaustive checklist. Rather read it as a portrait of the kind of person that can safely approach the King of Glory. It's summarized into four particular qualifications.
- ❖ **First, to approach the King of Glory we must have “clean hands”.** Clean hands refer to righteous actions. The word *clean* is translated elsewhere in Scripture as *innocent*, as in innocent blood. So to have “clean hands” means to have hands that are clean of innocent blood. It obviously means you haven't murdered anyone, but it also means you're not oppressing or injuring anyone physically or emotionally. Simply put, to have clean hands means that your behavior and treatment of others is characterized as innocent (righteous).
- ❖ **Second, to approach the King of Glory we must have “pure hearts”.** Now the attention is shifted inward to not just our actions but our thoughts and motives. Because you can keep your hands clean but still be guilty of an impure heart.
 - ▶ To be honest, many of us are good at keeping our hands clean. We know how to keep the rules so that, on the outside, we look innocent. If clean hands were the only qualification, for some of us, we might have a chance of passing. But we can't overlook the necessity of a pure heart. It can disqualify you.
- ❖ **Third, to approach the King of Glory we must not “lift up our soul to what is false”.** What's in view here is our fidelity towards God, our allegiance to him as King. To lift up one's soul to someone or something means to trust that person or thing. Look at **Psalm 25:1-2**. *“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; O my God, in you I trust.”* So we're supposed to lift up our soul to God, to trust him!
 - ▶ But instead we've lifted up our soul to what is false. Some translations say to an idol. Now just because you don't have a shrine at home, doesn't mean you're in the clear. Idols aren't just statutes of wood or stone. **Any person, position, or possession that replaces God as the object of our ultimate trust is a potential idol.** So when we lift up our souls to them and put our trust in them, we've disqualified ourselves.

- ❖ **Fourth, to approach the King of Glory we must not “swear deceitfully”.** In other words, we must have complete integrity before God. That means if we have pledged our exclusive loyalty to God as our King but then break that pledge by lifting up our soul to another – we’re disqualified!
- ❖ **So to sum it up, if we are to approach Yahweh, our Creator and King, we basically have to be perfect as he is perfect** (Mt. 5:48). We need hands that are perfectly clean, hearts that are completely pure, fidelity towards God that is absolutely committed, and integrity of character that is faultless. We need to be perfect!
 - ▶ Now as Creator and Ruler, God has every right to make such demands. But remember these qualifications are for our good. Otherwise we’d be consumed by his holiness.
- ❖ *So who here is ready to ascend that holy hill? Who here is ready to stand in the holy place before a holy, righteous God?* I think I can speak for us all when I say, “Not I”. I’m not ready. None of us are ready. The truth is we all fall short of the standards. And we know it.
 - ▶ Even if you don't believe in God or believe universal standards exist, you'd admit that you fall short of even your own. Imagine if each of us were to wear a recording device around our necks that was specially designed to capture any sentences out of our mouths that included the words "*you should / you must / you ought to*".
 - **And imagine at the end of a week we were to play back every imperative you made, every standard you placed on others – how would you measure up?** Even if we laid aside the idea of God's standards and qualifications, I think you'd admit that you would fall short of even your own.
- ❖ But since we have the Scriptures, we don’t have to rely on our own standards and qualifications. God has made his known. We must be as he is – perfect and righteous as he is.

How Can We Ever Attain These Qualifications?

- ❖ I know what you’re thinking. That standard is unreasonable. It’s too high for any one of us to achieve. We’re human after all, prone to sin and error. *How can anyone ever attain these qualifications?* That’s our final question. How will we ever be qualified to stand before God?
 - ▶ V4 alone has already disqualified every one of us. And if the psalm stopped here, this would be the worse news possible. But thanks be to God that the psalm continues with good news.
 - Look at vv5-6. “*He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*”
- ❖ **These verses describe for us a man who *does* approach God, but notice he’s not relying on his own righteousness to ascend the hill.** No, instead in v6 he’s described as part of the generation of those who seeks the face of God. And for so doing, v5 says, “*He will receive blessing from the Lord.*” And not only that, he’ll receive “*righteousness from the God of his salvation.*” (Some translations say he’ll receive “*vindication from God his Savior*”)

- ▶ This is an example of parallelism, which is common in poetry, where the second line of a poetic stanza develops the idea introduced to us in the first line. So the *blessing from the Lord* is being paralleled with *righteousness from God*.
 - **In other words, the blessing from the Lord is righteousness from God, and it's by this blessing, this gift of righteousness, that we'll be deemed qualified to ascend the hill.** That's what it means to be vindicated by God. It means he declares you righteous and qualified to approach him.

- ❖ This is the good news! **The qualifications needed to approach the King of Glory – though they cannot be achieved by human effort – they can be received by a divine blessing of righteousness available to all who seek the face of the God of Jacob with eyes of faith.**
 - ▶ The mention of Jacob refers back to Genesis 32 where he wrestled all night long with the Lord, not willing to let go until he received a blessing. Finally at daybreak, the Lord blessed Jacob. And in morning light, he realized he had struggled with God, saw his face, and yet lived! So he named that place *Peniel*, which means *face of God*.

- ❖ Like any sinner before God, Jacob deserved to die for his sins, but God spared him and more than that, he blessed him. And in the same way, those who seek the face of God, who hold fast to Him by faith like Jacob, will not only be spared from His judgment but also blessed with His righteousness. With this gift we are vindicated. Christians are declared righteous in view of God's holy qualifications for a relationship with him.

- ❖ *But how can God vindicate unclean, impure sinners who lack both fidelity and integrity? How can he call me qualified when in reality I have yet to meet these qualifications? How can he declare sinners like us to be righteous when in reality we're still unrighteous?*
 - ▶ The answer to these vexing questions is found in vv7-10. **Here the imagery shifts from God the Judge** (who declares sinners righteous, who deems the unholy to be qualified) **to the imagery of God the Warrior King** (who fights on our behalf to ensure the reality of what he has declared us to be).

- ❖ Throughout their history, the Israelites found themselves in bondage to other nations, which led them to cry out to God for rescue. And in mercy, he would save them. He would free them from bondage. But think about it: *Did he just sit on his throne in heaven and make a royal declaration that Israel is free, when in fact they were still in chains? Was his declaration of their freedom just a legal fiction with no grounding in reality?*
 - ▶ No, God actually came down as a Warrior King and fought for Israel. **He fought their battles to bring about the reality of what he declared them to be.** He not only called them 'free'. He made sure they were.
 - **In the same way, God not only calls a Christian righteousness and qualified. He came down to make it a reality.**

- ❖ When commentators try to connect Psalm 24 to a historical event in David's life, they say he probably wrote it to commemorate the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem after God defeated all their enemies. This is found in 2 Samuel 6.
 - ▶ As David led the procession that day, we can just imagine him approaching the gates of Jerusalem, crying out in a loud voice, "*Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in.*"
 - And coming from inside the city gates, he heard a voice asking, "*Who is this King of Glory?*" And with a triumphant voice, David and the entire procession with him shouted, "*The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of Hosts – he is the King of Glory.*"
 - **And these words reminded the Israelites that they did not achieve their freedom on their own.** It was the Lord of Hosts who fought for them to actually accomplish the reality of their freedom.

- ❖ **But as glorious as David's ascent on that day must have been, it only foreshadowed another day, when another man would make that same ascent.** A thousand years later, another man would approach the gates of Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He would be welcomed by a throng of people shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (Mt. 21:9), causing the inhabitants of the city to ask themselves, "*Who is this?*" (Mt. 21:11).
 - ▶ And on that day, the first day of the week before Passover (on what we call Palm Sunday), he would ascend the hill of the Lord, enter the temple courts, and ironically, on that very day the temple priests were leading others in singing Psalm 24.

- ❖ And as they sang about the qualifications needed to ascend the holy hill and stand in the holy place, little did they know that the only man who has ever qualified to ascend by his own righteousness was standing in their presence.
 - ▶ But instead of recognizing him as the rightful Messiah, they turned on him. They trumped up false charges and condemned him to death. And on the following Friday, they crucified him outside the city gates.

- ❖ **But little did they know, that on the cross, the King of Glory, would accomplish his greatest victory.** On the cross, Jesus did battle against sin and won. On the cross, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).
 - ▶ And after Jesus was buried, on the third day, he rose as a Victor over sin and death. And then he ascended on high to the ancient gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem. And a multitude of angels and all the host of heaven sang on that day, "*Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in.*"
 - **The Lord Jesus – our Warrior King – finally returned home.** He returned to his heavenly throne, where he awaits that coming day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11).

- ❖ **And on that day, every one of us will be presented before this King, and he will be looking for qualifications.** Many will stand condemned. Their mouths will be shut, and they will be cast from the King's presence into outer darkness. But those who have put their trust in the King's substitutionary life, death, and resurrection will be mercifully spared.
 - ▶ **Because their sin has been paid for by the King's death and the King's righteousness life has been credited to their account.** So the faithful in Christ are declared "Not Guilty" for sin and at the same time "Qualified" to enter the kingdom.

- ❖ And this declaration will not be a legal fiction, for the King has ensured the reality of what he declares us to be. If the devil were to accuse us and ask, "*What about all your sin? Shouldn't that bar you from God?*" We simply point to the cross and say, "***There it is – nailed to the place where Jesus died! The penalty is paid. It is finished.***"
 - ▶ And if he were to ask, "*Where is all your righteousness? Don't you need to be perfectly clean, perfectly pure, with perfect fidelity and integrity if you want to approach God? Where are your qualifications?*" We simply point to heaven and say, "***There he is – seated at the right hand of God. Jesus is my righteousness! I in him, he in me.***" (cf. Jn. 14:20)
 - Through faith in Jesus, he becomes your righteousness – your necessary qualification to ascend that holy hill and stand before God in worship.

Conclusion

- ❖ I'm not surprised if many of you are thinking: *This is different. I've never heard this before. I never knew God requires qualifications to approach him. That he has these conditions and standards that must be met before you have his approval to approach.*
 - ▶ You feel like this is something new. But I disagree. I think you already knew this. You already knew that God has qualifications and standards for you to be in his presence whether you've thought about it or not.

- ❖ But think about it now. **One of the perennial struggles we go through is the fear and realization that we're not good enough.** We don't meet our standards, let alone God's. We're not as good of a student as we expect (or our parents expect). We're not as good at our jobs as we pretend to be. We're not as good of a husband or wife or father or mother that we thought we'd be. We're not that good of a friend to others and not that good of a friend to God. We're thought we would be better than we really are.
 - ▶ That's an uncomfortable thought. And that's why we find ourselves living for the approval of others, even if it's just self-approval. And to gain that approval, we perform. We perform to meet those standards and achieve those qualifications.

- ❖ Now if that's your way of thinking, that's how you'll approach a relationship with God. **You'll try to perform to qualify yourself before him, to be good enough in his eyes. And when you fail (and yes, you will), you'll either give up on yourself or on God.** You'll despair over yourself or you'll end up denying God himself.

- ❖ But let this gospel truth sink in. **If you're a Christian, remind yourself that Jesus came down to meet those standards and achieve those qualifications *for you*.** And by virtue of your union with him (the fact that you're hidden in him), Jesus is now your righteousness.
 - ▶ When God looks at you, he doesn't see your sin but instead the sinlessness of his Son. He doesn't see your disobedience but the obedience of Christ that qualifies you to safely approach the King of Glory (cf. Rom. 5:19).

- ❖ **If this truth sinks in, you'll no longer be living *for* God's approval. You'll be living *from* God's approval.** You'll live out of the hope-giving reality that he already approves of you in Christ alone.
 - ▶ Then you'll have the proper (stronger) motivation to pursue clean hands and a pure heart, to live a life of fidelity and integrity. You'll do it out of love from a place of security, not of fear from a place of anxiety or desperation.
 - Because you know you're fully qualified before God in Christ. That's what this truth can do in your heart and in your life.

- ❖ **And if you are not a Christian, I realize you may initially be turned off to discover that the God of the Bible requires qualifications from people.** *But truly, would you want anything less from God?* Would you really want to serve a god who asks for no qualifications – a god whose standard of holiness is no greater than your own? Is that a god worth giving your life to?
 - ▶ Wouldn't you rather serve a God who is utterly holy with the highest of standards, but who is so loving and merciful that he came down in the flesh to live the life you should have lived and to die the death you deserve, so that if you seek his face with your whole heart – he will bless you and qualify you to live in relationship with him?
 - That is the God of the Bible, and he makes this blessing available to you today if you seek his face with a heart of faith.