

How To Get To Heaven From Psalm 24

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[0 : 00] Psalm 24. Psalm of David. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

! The world and those who dwell therein.! For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.! 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. He does not lift up his soul to what is false.

He does not swear deceitfully. 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. Selah. Lift up your heads, O gates. And be lifted up, O ancient doors. That the King of glory may come in.

[0 : 58] Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates.

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.

Amen. There are a few passages in the Bible that we return to over and over because they so helpfully summarize the gospel message.

I just want you to think about some of those passages that maybe you return to over and over because of how they cover this amazing gospel. The most famous is probably John 3, 16, right? For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. A wonderful verse to memorize and have in our hearts.

[2 : 03] Something that kind of concisely brings the heart of the message of the gospel that we can be encouraged by day by day. That we can share with others in our evangelism and so on. But there's a lot of passages like that, aren't there?

You might think of a passage like Philippians 2, 11 to 15. That great Christology, or excuse me, 6 to 11. That great Christology about Christ who, though he was in his essence God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but took on human flesh and became lower, a servant, obedient to death, even the death on the cross, so that now he is exalted as the Lord of all, right? We might return to that one again and again. Isaiah 53, we read it just a minute ago with the prayer of confession. We might go to that all the time just thinking about the goodness of the atonement of Christ that he has made for our sins.

I want to suggest this morning that Psalm 24 is one of those gospel texts that we should return to again and again and again.

That like Isaiah 53 and John 3, 16 and Philippians 2 and a host of other passages, this one really helpfully summarizes and almost gives an expansive look at the whole message of the Bible from beginning to end.

[3 : 29] It starts with God and creation. Then it confronts us in our sinful condition. Then it points us to a Savior who does what we were unable to do and then rejoices in our place in God's kingdom.

And it does all of this by keeping one thing at the forefront of the attention. Rather, one person at the forefront of the attention. The King of Glory.

The Anointed King that David writes about over and over and over in these psalms. It's a great gospel psalm. Now, no specific setting is given for it.

And to be honest with you, attempts to try to force it into a historic setting, I think, tend to be unhelpful. Many have suggested that perhaps this was a liturgical psalm used at an event like when David goes up with the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem.

But there's no real context clues that make that plain for us. It's conjecture. And to be honest, I think it might hinder, actually, the proper understanding of the psalm.

[4 : 45] What we do know is that David wrote it. That's what's plain to us, isn't it, in the superscription. That this is a psalm of David. And it is enough to know that David authored the psalm and that he placed it in a series of other songs that are focused on the salvation that will come to God's people through his promised king.

That's the theme of the psalms that we're in right now, isn't it? Repeatedly, David speaks of this king. He speaks of the salvation of this king. He speaks of the overflow of the blessing of this salvation on the king's people.

Clearly, he's pointing us forward to the promised king, Jesus. Now, historically, Christians have used Psalm 24 in their celebrations of the ascension of Christ.

Ascension Day, which in some liturgical circles comes 40 days after Easter every year. And Psalm 24 would be at least a reading, if not something of an exposition or homily in those services.

I think that's actually quite appropriate, given that the emphasis in this psalm is on the king's return to glory after winning salvation for his people.

[6 : 02] But no matter when you use it or where you use it, the fact remains that this song is rich with gospel truth. And we know that that gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.

Now, I'm not going to give you a bunch of headings today. I just want to walk from beginning to end in Psalm 24. And what I want to show you is how you can get to heaven from Psalm 24.

How you can get to the kingdom from Psalm 24. Look with me at verses 1 and 2 again. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

The world and those who dwell therein. For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Now, as David often does, we've seen this a number of times already.

He opens the song, turning our attention to the glory of God in creation, doesn't he? This time, however, his emphasis is on the Lord's ownership of the world, particularly the people who dwell in it.

[7 : 15] Do you see that in the first verse? The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. The world is his and all who dwell in it.

The language is possessive, literally, to the Lord, the earth in its fullness. Asserting that all existence, everything we see, everything that exists, it belongs to God.

And it serves the purpose of his will. We might find the echo of this in the book of Revelation. I think it's in chapter 4. The great multitude that lift up their praise to God.

Holy are you, Lord God. For you have created all things, and for your purpose, by your will, you have created them. We're told it's the worship in heaven.

I think that's an echo of this truth that's here, that the Lord owns the world. He owns all who live in the world, and for his purposes, he has made it.

[8 : 14] He governs the world according to his sovereign will, and all people are accountable to him. I think that's the emphasis of his ownership. He owns us.

We are his. Therefore, we are accountable to him. Now, in verse 2, we find the grounds for that assertion.

Why is it that David can say in verse 1 that the earth belongs to the Lord, that he has sovereign right over it, and that we are accountable to him as people who live in the world?

Well, he can say that on the grounds that the Lord himself is the creator of the world, and that he is the creator of those who dwell in the world. So that in verse 2, we find not only the lordship of God over the world, but we find now his power, his goodness, his majesty in its creation.

He founded and established a stable and habitable place set above the levels of the seas, and the rivers, we're told.

[9 : 24] Why would he do that? So that the people he has created to dwell in it could live and flourish according to his design. Now, David is doing something with brevity that would take me an hour to do.

In just two verses, he's letting us know that we belong to the Lord, we're accountable to him, and we are because he's our creator, and this world that we live in is the work of his hands, and it is stable, and it is habitable so that we might live and flourish.

That is who this God is. That is what he has done, and we are his. Now, there's a question, we mention this from time to time.

Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is there something rather than nothing? It's an existential question that we all have to reckon with at some point.

And many people, people that you know, people that you love, they do everything that they can to wrestle with this question and to provide some kind of answer for their own existence that doesn't require that they acknowledge a creator in the midst of it or a God that they must be held accountable to for the way that they exist and the way that they live.

[10:46] But I contend that the only satisfactory answer to that question is the Bible's answer, and it's the answer that's provided for us in these two verses.

What is it that David is telling us? You exist because God made you. You are not an accident. You did not evolve over millions of years just by chance and will be here for a little while and then you'll go off and die and that's it.

That's not true of you. You exist because God made you. Your purpose in existence is the one that he, as your creator, has assigned to you.

Namely, that you would reflect his glory, that you would know him personally, that you would flourish in the world that he has created. For your good.

And because you are his creation, you are accountable to him as creator. Now, when we consider the psalm as a whole, these opening verses seem almost out of place, don't they?

[12:03] We just read the whole thing together. Now that you go back and reflect, there's amazing truth in the first two verses, but how is it that they actually fit with the rest of the psalm? Seems a bit scattered, doesn't it?

Why did David put them here? How do they fit with the rest of the psalm? Well, for one, it prepares us, just to give you a hint here, it prepares us for this amazing payoff at the end of the psalm.

But you have to wait before we get to that. What it also does, this emphasis on man's accountability to God by virtue of creation, is it anticipates a crucial question that is asked in verse 3.

So set your eyes on verse 3. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? This God who has created all things, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?

The hill of the Lord, the holy place, they refer to God's exalted place above his creation, that he is higher than us. He exalted above us as Lord.

[13:16] It's the throne from which he governs the world and issues his divine judgments. In Psalm 2, perhaps you'll remember, God's holy hill is where he has placed his anointed king who executes justice against his enemies.

In Psalm 15, God's holy hill is where God is, and it's where David longs to dwell and to dwell with God. The Israelites, depending on which point in history they may have been singing this song, might have first thought of the tabernacle, or the temple, which was the place of God's presence on earth.

But notice what David is asking. If the hill of the Lord is where God is, if it's where he rules his creation, if it's where he issues divine judgments, if it's the place of his presence, the question is, who can get there?

Who can be there? Who can enjoy that place with the Lord? The only way for man to get to God is to ascend.

That's what it says. Who shall ascend? Underscoring the Lord's place above his creatures. To ascend is often used in the Old Testament to speak of going up to God in worship.

[14:47] But then there's another thing in the second part of the verse. To stand. To stand after ascending means to stand in judgment, proving worthy to remain in God's presence.

That's the question. The questions posed are about who qualifies to go into God's presence safely. Who can survive his judgment?

Who can enjoy his presence? Who can worship him on his holy hill? We might say it this way. Who can go to heaven?

Who can enter the kingdom? Who is it that God will accept? And the answer is in verse 4.

Set your eyes on it. He who has clean hands and a pure heart who does not lift his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

[15:59] Let's break this apart. What does he mean? Well, to have clean hands is to be innocent of wrong action. You've heard the phrase caught red-handed, right?

To have a pure heart is to be innocent of a corrupt nature. That is, to be pure of soul in the inner man.

If clean hands is the external action, a pure heart is the inner man that no one else sees. What's actually true of you that no one else may know is true of you. Your nature. Not lifting up one's soul to what is false means to be innocent of false worship is the idea there.

And then, of course, not swearing falsely is to be innocent of deceit deceit and hypocrisy the way that we live. That's pretty high standard, isn't it? Clean hands, pure heart, does not swear falsely, does not lift himself up in false worship.

[17:09] Now, here's the thing about these categories. They're not relative. They're absolute. In the psalm, they are. David does not mean to say that the one who is allowed to enjoy the presence of God who will stand in the judgment is the one whose hands are clean relative to the dirtiness of someone else's.

That's not what he's saying. He is not saying that the one who will be accepted by God is the one who is pure in heart relative to the impurity of someone else's heart or that has been faithful in worship relative to the unfaithfulness of someone else's worship or has lived a life of honesty and truthfulness and genuineness in relation to someone else who has not done so.

That's not what David is saying. This is not relativism. It can't be. It's absolute categories here. Relativism, then, is an express lane to eternal hell.

It is a doctrine of demons that deceives countless souls into thinking that God will accept them because they aren't as bad as someone else's.

And somewhere along the way, we started using the most wicked people we can think of as the measurement or the standard by which to judge our own goodness.

[18:47] Now, here's what I mean. Hitler is everyone's favorite, right? Perhaps you've had somebody, an unbeliever, or maybe even a professing Christian who has made a statement like this to you.

Well, I think someone like Hitler deserves to go to hell. Look at all that he did, but I don't deserve to go to hell. I'm not as bad as he is. As long as I'm not as wicked as someone like Hitler, God will reward me for being a good person.

Surely, I'm a good person in God's eyes. Look at all these other people who are so much worse than me. We take the most wicked people we can think of and we let them be the standard by which we judge our own goodness.

That is the opposite of what the Bible does. That's why I say this idea of relativism, it is a doctrine of demons, it is a deceit. Don't fall for it. Don't fall for it.

Make sure your friends and family aren't falling for it. The Bible does the exact opposite. The standard for our goodness is never the wicked. The standard for our goodness is always the most righteous.

[19:59] Matthew 5, 20, Jesus says, I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, the people that Jesus is addressing there, when they think scribes and Pharisees, they think these are the holiest people around.

Nobody knows the law and observes the law like they do. And Jesus is saying, unless you can beat them in self-righteousness, you're not going to make it.

Later on in the same chapter, Jesus takes it even further. He says, therefore, you must be perfect according to what standard? As your heavenly Father is perfect, he says.

Well, that's a completely different standard now. What is Jesus training us to do? To judge our goodness, not on the basis of the wicked people in our lives, but to judge our goodness on the basis of the righteous one.

Peter does it in 1 Peter 1, 15 and 16. As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy.

[21:10] The standard for goodness and righteousness according to the Bible and the way that God teaches us and speaks to us is never the wicked. It is always the righteous. So what then, when we come back to Psalm 24, what then qualifies an individual to dwell with God according to David?

Moral perfection. Moral perfection. The only way you get to heaven is through moral perfection. The only way you stand on the holy hill of God in that judgment is moral perfection.

The Lord is so holy, a consuming fire according to the writer of Hebrews. that no speck of unrighteousness can enter his presence without being consumed.
What is David giving us here? He's giving us a big God theology. A mighty God. A holy God. A God who will not tolerate sin. Who cannot tolerate sin. Even the most minute of sins according to our judgments. He will consume.

[22 : 27] Now, it's worth noting that David uses the singular he at this point. Notice it in verse 4.

Who shall ascend? He who has clean hands and a pure heart and so on. Well, that could just be a simple reference to a type of person. that anyone who is able to maintain this type of moral perfection will be able to ascend the hill and there's a sense in which that's true but I don't think that's what David is communicating.

I don't think he's talking about a type of person. I think he's talking about a particular person and that will become abundantly clear here in just a moment. Now, we know that David's not talking about himself.

We know that's true. David readily admitted that he didn't have clean hands. That he didn't have a pure heart. I don't know of a time where he engaged in false worship except while we might define false worship as just the idols of our hearts but he certainly was dishonest.

He certainly was hypocritical in some places. Right? David's not talking about himself here. Who's he talking about? There's only one possibility.

[23 : 44] David writes here of this future Messiah King promised by God in his covenant with David. Only Jesus meets the qualifications of moral perfection required to stand in God's presence.

He alone is worthy to ascend the hill of the Lord. And in verse 5 we find the king's reward for this righteousness.

Set your eyes on that. Verse 5. He that is this righteous one from verse 4. He will receive blessing from the Lord whereas everyone else who stands before the Lord will receive judgment, condemnation.

Oh, not this one. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Because of his perfect righteousness the king will receive blessing from the Lord and that blessing is the declaration of his righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Now we talked about this last week in Lakeside Connect. What is this? Justification. This is the formal declaration of righteousness. The Lord, the creator looks at his king and says righteous vindication.

[25 : 12] But notice who it is that vindicates the king. Notice what David says. He receives righteousness, the declaration of righteousness, justification from the God of what?

His salvation. Well, that introduces an important question, doesn't it? How is it that the righteous one needs salvation?

Just the fact that the God of salvation is the term that's used requires that there must be something from which he must be saved. But how is it that the righteous one, the only one worthy to ascend the hill of the Lord, how is it possible that he needs salvation?

And if he is truly righteous, why does he need to be vindicated or declared righteous? Wouldn't we already know? As I've said over the last few weeks, there's some things that David didn't know for sure.

There are mysteries that are revealed in the New Testament gospel, is it there? But there are some things that David did know. David knew that the glory of the Messiah King would come through suffering.

[26 : 28] And that in his suffering, God would openly deliver and vindicate his future King. This is the mystery of the gospel declared in the Psalm, revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We just read it a moment ago, again, in Isaiah 53. What is it that verse 4 says? We read it just a moment ago. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Well, how did we perceive that? How did humans looking on at this sacrifice perceive what was happening? We esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

When we look on the Christ, when humans looked on the Christ, they said, this is the judgment of God for his sin. And what is it that Isaiah then turns around and clarifies for us?

Oh, but he was pierced for our transgressions. This is giving us a picture. It's pointing us forward to the crucifixion and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 35] Jesus, the righteous one, of Psalm 24, suffered death for the sins of mankind. And how was he vindicated? Through resurrection. We look at the crucifixion.

Humans, that is sinful humans, look at the crucifixion and say, he's being judged by God for his sin. And then three days later, God raises him from the dead with a megaphone that says, righteous, righteous, righteous.

It's justification. Salvation through his suffering. And why did he suffer? Not for his sins. But he made an atonement for sinners.

Which brings us to verse 6. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

And then David gives us this liturgical note, Selah. He just says, just stop for just a second, just think about that. Just think about it, he says. So let's think about it. The blessing of the one in verse 5.

[28 : 51] Here in verse 6 becomes the blessing of the many. Such is the generation, a group.

This is not speaking of millennials or boomers, whatever you may be, or Gen Z or whatever. It's not that kind of generation. It's speaking of a group of people, right? A group of people.

This blessing, this declaration of righteousness and justification, taken and given rightly to the righteous one, is now shared by a group of people, a generation of people.

Jesus is the only one who qualifies to ascend the hill of the Lord and to stand in his holy place. But because he died in the place of sinners, a whole generation of people are now able to ascend the hill of the Lord with him.

He took our penalty so that we can receive his blessing. 2 Corinthians 5.21, for our sake he was made to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[30 : 08] Now Jesus rightly ascends the hill of the Lord based on his perfect righteousness. But we don't have that righteousness. How is it possible that we might ascend the hill of the Lord with Jesus the righteous one?

Well it tells us in verse 6, such is the generation of those not who are able to be righteous as he is righteous, such as the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. What is this? It's justification by faith. Jesus the righteous one truly is able to ascend.

And then he imputes that righteousness onto us so that we can ascend not because of our righteousness but because of his and because our faith in his own righteousness.

It's amazing. That's what it means to seek him and to seek the face of God. It is salvation by faith alone. Just as Jesus is declared righteous by God the Father, so are those who seek him.

[31 : 15] His righteousness is applied to the account of all who trust in him by faith. So what leaves us discouraged in verse 3 and 4 to acknowledge that there is no righteousness that we can bring, that standing before the Lord on our own, all we have is judgment and hell.

We're now lifted up in verse 6. Because of the righteous one, we have been blessed. Romans 3, we are justified, we are declared righteous by his grace as a gift.

Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, through this salvation that he has won, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, a full satisfaction of God's wrath against sin.

And how do we receive that? Paul says to be received by faith. Nothing else. It's not faith, as the church of Rome would say, faith, plus your baptism, plus the Eucharist, plus the sacraments, plus a little bit of time in purgatory, plus all the things that will gradually purify you until you are truly righteous.

No, it's not that. It's faith alone. Trust Christ. It's him alone. Romans 4, righteousness will be counted to us who believe in him, who raised from the dead, Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.

[32 : 56] Now that brings us to the last part of the psalm, verses 7 to 10. Lift up your heads, O gates. Be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the king of glory may come in.

Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord, mighty in battle. And then it's repeated for dramatic effect. 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? And here's the change. The Lord of hosts. He is the king of glory. And we come to the final movement and we think, wow, this doesn't, what is this?

Shouldn't this just be a psalm on its own? No, it fits perfect. It's just the image changes somewhat.

In this final movement, David turns the focus to the king of glory, the righteous one, from the middle

of the psalm.

The image here is again the hill of the Lord. The righteous one, now called the king of glory, stands before the gates of God's holy place, of the kingdom, of heaven, of his throne.

[34 : 10] And with him are all those whom he has redeemed in the battle against death and hell. And the king commands, summons, for the gates to be opened.

Open the gates so that the king and his people may come in. And then the doorkeepers respond like good doorkeepers. King of glory, who is this king of glory?

Oh, and then comes an astounding answer. The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord, mighty in battle.

The Lord of hosts. He is the king of glory. Here, the king of glory is identified as Yahweh himself. The Lord himself. Now, where else have we seen Yahweh in the psalm at the beginning.

[35 : 12] Verses one and two. To Yahweh, the earth and its fullness. The Lord who created everything and to whom all people are accountable.

He is the king of glory who fights our battle, who ascends the hill of the Lord with all of his people in tow. He summons the gates to open so that all who are with him may enter into his kingdom and enjoy his eternal blessing.

Now, here's the payoff. If the Lord himself is the king of glory, whom we said in the middle of the psalm, must absolutely refer to the person of Jesus Christ.

If that is who the Lord is, if that is who the king of glory is, if he is the one who ascends, then he must first have descended from his exalted place as creator, which is established in verses one and two.

He cannot ascend the hill unless he has first descended from that hill. And where do we find that? In the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus himself affirms this in John chapter 3 verse 13.

[36 : 23] No one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven, the son of man. What is this teaching us? What is David teaching us?

This Messiah king, this savior, this king of glory is the Lord himself. Jesus is not just a man who is superior to all other men.

That's not who Jesus is. He is the king of glory. He is the eternal God who became man to fulfill Psalm 24. For us to be saved, so that we can ascend the hill and stand in the judgment.

The only way that's possible is if the Lord himself were to descend to us and take on human flesh and fulfill the law that we have all broken and pay the penalty of our sin through his death and then be vindicated by rising from the dead and ascending back to his throne to guarantee our entrance to his kingdom.

That is the only way that we could ever stand before God. It's the only way that any of us will ever be accepted by God. Not on the basis of our righteousness but on the sole basis of the righteousness of the Lord himself, the king of glory, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

[37 : 49] And by faith we enter into his glory. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves and he has done it out of his measureless love.

He did not do it because he had to do it. Why would he do this? Why would he do this? There's only one answer.

Love. God shows his love toward us in that while we are yet sinners, Christ dies for us. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And whosoever believes in him will not perish and have everlasting life. In this is the love of God. Not that we have loved him but that he has loved us and has sent his only son to be the propitiation for our sins.

That's what John says. Love. Love is why he's done it. And he invites us into this love. He invites you into this love by faith.

[38 : 58] To try to do it with anything except faith is an insult to the king of glory. To try to think or insist that I will follow Jesus but I will be truly accepted if I get all these other things right and if I get baptized and if I do the stuff and if I live a pretty good life is to spit in the face of the Savior who descended from the throne and was crucified on a cross to provide a sufficient and final offering for your guilt and to insist that it's anything but stepping into that love by faith is a mockery of what he has done.

And yet he says come this is for you believe my gospel turn from your sin he's opened the gates he's flung them wide open for all who will repent and believe which leaves us with only one question

to ask will you believe we leave everything else stop trying to do all the stuff just follow him leave it all behind and trust his gospel trust his righteousness as sufficient and enter his kingdom by faith and by faith alone only those who do that will be able to stand on the hill of the Lord on the hill of the Lord