

The Earth is the Lord's

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the psalm that we read, Psalm 24. And just read to the beginning, 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, and so on. Now, it's readily acknowledged that Psalm 22, Psalm 23, and Psalm 24 go together, and that these three psalms speak of our Savior.

There are some people who are very good at giving titles to different things, and they have seen Christ as a Savior in Psalm 22 as suffering.

In Psalm 23, as a shepherd, and in Psalm 24, as a sovereign. Or, to put it another way, in Psalm 22, they see the cross.

Psalm 23, they see the crook. That is the shepherd's crook. And in Psalm 24, they see the crown. And it's quite interesting when you can sort of put things like that.

[1 : 16] Now, most people are persuaded that this psalm found its, I suppose, its source in the bringing back of the ark, or where David brought the ark that had been taken away.

Remember, it was one of the bleakest parts in the history of Israel when the ark of the Lord, the ark of the covenant, had been captured by the Philistines. It was during the time when Eli, you remember how Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, Eli, while a good man, his sons who were following his priests were evil, and the Philistines were causing all kinds of problems, and Israel were losing in the battle.

And they thought, what a good idea to go and take the ark of the covenant out of the tabernacle and take it to the battlefield. And surely that will help us.

You remember how, of course, that didn't work, because God was not with Israel because of just their corruption and their wickedness, and the ark was captured by the Philistines.

And it paints a fearfully bleak picture. But, of course, eventually the ark came back because the Philistines couldn't keep it. Wherever they kept it, there were problems and difficulties. So the ark had remained away.

[2 : 39] It was in different locations, and it had stayed for a long time in Kirjath-Jerim. And David eventually brought back the ark of the covenant. And, of course, he brought it back with great celebration.

And you read about it in Kings and in Chronicles. It gives us a very vivid account of the bringing of the ark back. It was a time of tremendous triumph and bringing the ark to the city of Jerusalem.

The ark, as you'll remember, it was a simple, in a sense, a kind of a chest, a wooden box that was covered with gold. And in the ark, there were three things kept.

There was a pot of manna, and there was Aaron's rod that had budded, and there was the Ten Commandments and the tablet of stone.

And these three things were there to remind Israel of God's covenant blessing to them. The manna was, of course, speaking about God's provision.

[3 : 42] Remember how God had provided for them all the way through the wilderness. The rod, Aaron's rod, which budded and blossomed, spoke about God's power.

And, of course, the commandments spoke about God's law. So these three things were in the pot. You can read about that in Hebrews chapter 9. It tells you the things that were there in the ark.

And, of course, the ark, there was a mercy seat on the top with the cherubim. And remember how every year the high priest went into the most holy place, or the holy of holies, and he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice onto it.

And in this way, God was dealing with the sin of his people, where he was, through the sacrifice, turning away his wrath.

And, of course, it's always by blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. Of course, all this was pointing to Jesus. So the ark was at the very center, in many ways, of the religious life of Israel.

[4 : 50] You remember when Israel, in fact, went into Canaan for the first time, when they crossed Canaan. All through the wilderness journey, it had been the cloud, the pillar of cloud that had led them.

But when they crossed the Jordan and went into the land of Canaan, into the land of promise, that is where the ark takes its presence. And the priests carried the ark way, way ahead of the people. And the people were to follow the ark. They weren't to follow the people in front of them. Their eyes were to be fixed upon the ark, which was way ahead, speaking to them of the leading presence and power of God.

And in a sense, that is how we have to walk as well. It's very significant. I think we mentioned that before. The ark wasn't right in front of the marching people, because if so, only the people at the front could see it.

And that would mean that those who followed would be, if only the people at the front could see, then it would mean that everybody else would take their lead from those who were in front of them.

[6 : 01] And God doesn't want us to take our lead simply from those, from others around. He always wants us to take our lead from himself. Yes, of course, other Christians influence us, and influence us for good.

And we're not to minimize. The Apostle Paul talks about the importance of that. But ultimately, our direction, our guidance, our way has to be in the way of the Lord, following him.

And that is why the ark was so far ahead, so that everybody, even those who were way back, were able to keep their eyes fixed upon it. And that's how we are to walk.

That's how we are to run. Looking unto Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of our faith. Now, this psalm, Psalm 24, very interestingly, was the psalm that was sung on what we would term the Sunday, the first day of the week in the old covenant, in the old days.

There was a psalm that was sung each day in the temple. The psalm that was sung on the Sabbath was Psalm 92. And the psalm that would be sung every, what would be this day, the first day of the week, was this particular Psalm 24.

[7 : 19] And isn't it amazing that way back in the dim and distant past, long before Jesus Christ came into this world, long before his resurrection, that the very psalm that is speaking about the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus is the psalm that they sang on the day that Jesus was going to rise from the dead.

So you see how there's a beautiful order and structure right throughout the Bible. And sometimes when we come across these things, we say, isn't that amazing? But of course, that's how, see, God has ordered and structured everything, and it's all beautiful.

There's a tremendous symmetry. I see, the more you delve into Scripture, the more you see the pattern and the way that God works everything. Now, this psalm, of course, here reminds us, as we see at the very beginning here, that God is creator and owner of this world.

It's all his. He makes it. He sustains it. We see here that the earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof. Literally, all that fills it.

And that means all the resources, all the natural resources, all the things that are part and partial of this world, all the beauty, all the wonderful things that make this world what it is.

[8 : 47] God made all these things. And we've got to remember that, that God made them not for our greed, not for our exploitation, but for our good and for his glory.

Twofold purpose. God made all the things in this world. And you know, it's amazing. People are, and it's wonderful when we see all the discoveries that are made and down throughout history, and they make life so good for us and so helpful.

But all the discoveries, people have only discovered what God has already, what is already there. And God has given people the minds and the understanding to discover and to develop these things.

There's nothing that has ever been discovered in the world that God didn't know about. It is God who has set all these things in motion. And they all belong to him.

And he has given this world for his glory, first and foremost, but also for our good. And that is why it is such a crime, why it is such a sin to see people being exploited, to see people being crushed.

[10:03] You look at some of the nations of this world and the corruption, where there are a small group of individuals or a small government or dictators, and they are becoming obscenely wealthy, while their people are living in absolute poverty.

There are huge natural resources within the country, and yet the people derive no benefit from it. These people, of course, will be so answerable to God for what they do, because God, it all belongs to God for his glory and for the good of all the people who live in this world.

You know, when you think about it, there shouldn't be starvation in this world. There is provision. If everything was divided equitably, there is sufficient for everyone in this world.

And when often we see the state, and of course we know that because of the way sometimes there are famines that come about because of severe drought and things like that, but there is still, if things were divided equitably, there is still sufficient for all.

So the earth, remember, belongs to the Lord. We've always got to remember that. Ultimately, it doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the Lord.

[11:25] But not only does the earth belong to the Lord, but all the people who dwell in it, the world and those who dwell therein. And it's no wonder the psalm says all people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord.

Not just God's people, but everybody should be singing to the Lord. The God who made us, the God who made everybody in this world and has brought all into existence.

There should be an acknowledgement, a singing to the Lord of praise and thanksgiving. And we see then that he has founded this world that we live in upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

And of course, this ties in with Genesis, which tells us this, where God said, let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place and let dry land appear.

And God called the dry land earth and the waters gathered together. He called seas. Now, of course, the seas, and particularly in Old Testament times in the Indian world, the seas always carried a threat.

[12:38] There was always this sense of fear of the unknown. And to a certain extent, that's still true. Nobody can be on the seas without having an awareness of just the power, the awesome power that is within the sea.

It's a frightening thing to see an angry sea. And I don't know if any of you see that. There are some of these programs on television about the fishermen, and there's one way up in the Bering Sea, way up in the north, and the deadliest catch, and they're fishing in the most extreme conditions.

And I one day walked in, and there was a horrendous storm. And one of the fishermen said, there are some people who say they don't believe in God.

They should all come out here. And I thought, there aren't atheists out on that sea. They are so aware of the power, of the threat, power far greater than themselves, and they know that their life ultimately is in the hand of God.

It was very telling. And so there has always been this sense of the threat of the sea, but particularly in the ancient world, there was always a sense of the restlessness of it.

[14:04] But you know, the great thing is that God reminds his people, the sea is mine. The sea and the land belong to me. Yes, there might be the threat of the sea.

It might be powerful. It might be a power far greater than yourself. But ultimately, it's under my authority and control. And Jesus displayed that. Jesus walked on the storm.

Jesus calmed the storm. One word. And it showed that everything is under his authority and control. He made it. He governs it. One word. Peace be still. And he changed the storm into a calm.

We must never lose sight of this fact. Now, we move on. And it then says, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Now, this psalm, of course, can be seen in two ways.

We can see it in its natural sense, in the sense of the ark coming back, and just a reminder of the authority, control of God, and of the Christian living as they should in a right way.

[15:08] And we'll look at it in both ways. But we can also see Christ running through it all. And if we hold the picture of Christ for a moment, we see in the first two verses, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, of course, is the very one by whom all things were made.

Nothing was made, we're told in the New Testament, but by the hand of Christ. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were involved in the creation. So, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, was wholly involved in the creation of this world.

But as we know, wonderful and all that the creation was, man sinned, man fell. The world, the beauty of it was broken. The harmony of the creation was destroyed.

The harmony that existed in families was shattered. You go to Genesis 3 and 4, and we see the beauty and harmony that existed between Adam and Eve, broken between Adam and Eve and God, broken between the family, broken because we see Cain killing evil.

It's breaking up, and it is because of that that Christ came into this world. And so we have the picture of the perfect person who ascends into the hill of God.

[16:26] And we have almost, you could say, a wonderful picture of Jesus there, as the one who stands in the holy place, the clean hands, the pure heart. And at one level, he was the only one who could fulfill that, because he is, was, and is the only one who is absolutely perfect.

Of course, he descended first in order to ascend. But again, if we look at it just as the life of the believer, and we see the believer ascending the hill of God to stand in the holy place of the Lord, this, of course, is speaking first and foremost here of worship.

And that is an absolutely essential aspect of our life. That's what we're doing just now. It's a wonderful way to begin the week by coming to worship God, to acknowledge Him, to bring this worship from our heart.

And one of the things in verse 3 that strikes you is that there has to be reverence when we come into the presence of God. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in His holy place? You see, there has to be, there has to be a sense of the fear of God in our heart.

[17:43] God is holy. We must never lose sight of that. Not that it means that our worship must be rigid. It doesn't mean that we must come with a craven fear.

We are community. We have to engage with one another. But there must always be a sense of reverence in the presence of the Lord. And it says that the worshiper stands.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? That gives the idea of continued, a continued presence before the Lord. It's not just in and out.

It's somebody who continues. And you know, at one level, while we engage in what we term public worship, in a sense, our life ought to be continued worship.

We have that idea, Paul gives us that idea, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto the Lord. So that there is the idea, when we go through the Bible, that our whole life, in a sense, there is an aspect of worship to it.

[18:51] And we've got to try and keep that in our thoughts, in our minds, as we journey through life. It certainly will help us. And then, of course, it talks here, the worshiper, about the clean hands.

And really, what this is saying is, what's the good of talking in a right way, if our life is not lived in a right way? If we are living in a dishonest way, if we're living in an immoral way, if we're living in an unjust way, if we're living in a violent way, if we're living in ways that are not consistent with what we confess or what we profess.

It was Spurgeon who said, in his own unique way, no king would want a servant serving him at his table if his hands were filthy. Here's the king, and there's a beautiful white tablecloth, and the beautiful silver service of everything, and then here's the waiter coming, and he's just been in the coals and the mud, his hands are absolutely filthy, covered in oil and everything.

The king would say, hey, I don't want you serving me like that. Go and clean your hands. And in a sense, this is a picture that if we are serving the Lord, then the Lord is looking for clean hands.

He's looking for a clean life and a pure heart. A heart that is clear so that our vision is clear. There's nothing blocking or marring our vision.

[20:24] You and I know how annoying it is if something comes into our eyes and we can't see clearly. It's blurred. And sin has the ability to blur our vision.

So there isn't the clear view. And this is what the Lord is looking for, the purity. The pure in heart shall see God. That's what Jesus tells us.

And that is what we need to strive for and work for. And we know how difficult it is because we're sinners. Impurity is part and partial of our life. That's what makes it so difficult.

That's why so much effort is required. So we see those who are truly seeking the Lord. He who has a clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully, he will receive blessing from the Lord.

The genuine, sincere worshiper will receive blessing from the Lord. And that's the person who ascends the hill.

[21 : 31] Remember, when we ascend, we don't ascend because of what we have. We don't ascend because of who we are. We ascend because of the invitation given to us.

We ascend because of what he has done. We ascend in order to receive the blessing. Receiving is one of the key words in the Christian faith.

It's all about receiving. Our salvation is a received salvation. salvation. We didn't earn it. We didn't win it ourselves.

We received it. Faith, that faith, that gift, it's a gift. Remember, we've always got to remember that. In fact, even going beyond salvation to everything that makes life what it is, the Lord says to us in the word of God, what do you have that you did not receive?

I think that's one of the most humbling verses in the Bible. It's challenging. What do you have that you did not receive? You know, it strips away everything from us and shows us that God is the one who has given us everything.

[22 : 53] You can look at it with regard to yourself, your own makeup, your own abilities, your own gifts, your home life, your work, your family, everything.

Ultimately, what do we have that we have not received? And into the realms of salvation it is the same. And that is why we have so much thanksgiving in our heart.

That is why we must stop and thank God. As the old chorus says, and rightly so, count your blessings. Name them one by one.

I can't remember does it say, amaze you or surprise you what the Lord has done. And that is true. You know, sometimes we groan and we grump about this and that.

But you know, sometimes we need to stop, think, reflect upon what we received, what we have got from God. and we will be amazed at what God has given us and what God has done for us in our life.

[24 : 00] And that is all tied into the blessing that we have here. This, then we see there is a blessing of salvation. Such is a generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Some translations just say straight away, Jacob, the God of Jacob. You remember Jacob and Esau. They were the twins. They stood for two groups, the two groups of this world.

Esau was happy. Esau was happy with the fatness of the earth. That was his portion. He was happy with that.

And you know, there are many people in life and that's what they're happy with. They are happy with what the world will give them. They are happy with what they can get in life themselves.

That's it. They won't look any further. They won't look any deeper. They won't look any higher. Just what the world will give. Of course, forgetting that ultimately it's what God gives.

[25 : 07] But that's all they're looking for. But the believer is seeking the face of God. Such is the generation of those who seek Him. My friend, are you seeking?

Are you seeking the face of God today? If you are a believer, you are. If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ, you are.

You continue to seek His face. When we talk about seeking His face, we're talking about seeking His favor, seeking His presence. It's like Jacob that's spoken of here.

Remember how Jacob wrestled with the angel and Jacob said, I won't let you go unless you bless me. Even although Jacob was being completely outwrestled, even although his hip was put out of joint, he says, I'm not letting you go until you bless me.

That's the kind of seeking that we speak about. Moses said, Lord, unless you carry us up, unless you go with us, I don't want to go.

[26 : 19] Is that who you are? Is that the kind of seeking? It's the Lord or nothing. It's the Lord that if you have the Lord, it's everything. If you don't have the Lord, it's nothing.

That's what's been spoken about here. Well, God's people seek the Lord's face continue. When you came here today, that's what you were seeking. His presence, his favor.

Just to know him, to experience a bit more, so that your mind, your heart will be opened a little more. And I would hope that if you're here today and you haven't come to faith in Christ, but deep down you say, you know, that's what I would like.

I would like to know that peace. I would like to know in my own heart what it is to really have God, to be persuaded, to be assured of having God as my God.

Well, if you're thinking like that deep down, then you are seeking. That is the voice of the seeker. It's a person who deep down in their soul is saying, I really want to know God as my God, as my Lord.

[27 : 33] That is what I need. That is what I know I need for my life. Well, keep on seeking. The word tells us that if we truly seek, we will find. And then just in a word, I was going to spend more of the time as going, we see the last section here of lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O engine doors, and so on.

Now again, if we think of David bringing the ark home, and we see the returning to Jerusalem, these great mighty gates opening up to allow the ark in.

But I think it is speaking, if we are thinking of Christ, it is speaking here of the arrival of Jesus Christ back into glory. And what a wonderful picture that is, because the language here is of a king, and it's of a warrior king who is strong and mighty.

the Lord mighty in battle. And here he comes to these doors. Now, the doors of heaven, or the gates of heaven, were closed against all humanity because of the fall.

Jesus Christ came down in order to open these gates. And he opened these gates by what he did. so that every single believer will enter these gates.

[28 : 56] These gates will be opened because of him. Now, of course, when it's asking there to open the ancient doors, be lifted up, you know how the idea, how the doors would be lifted up and the gates opened, it's not wondering, will we let Jesus in?

There is something here of the authority and the command. of course they've got to be opened. Here is a returning king who has won the battle, who has won the war, he's conquered the enemies. And you know, this is one of the wonderful things. Usually, an army went out to fight for their king. It's the reverse here.

The king has gone out to fight for his army. That's what Jesus has done. He is the one who has gone out to fight for us. He has won the battle.

He has won the war. Yes, there's a lot of land to be conquered. There's a lot of souls yet to be won for Christ. And Jesus sends us out. But he says the victory has been won.

[30 : 08] I've won it. But I would work for you to do in my kingdom. Because I want my kingdom to grow and to flourish. There's many souls yet to come in.

I'm going to use you. He could send angels from heaven, but he has chosen not to. He's using you and me. And he says, it's my work, but I am going to use you.

What an honor, what a privilege that has been given to us. What a responsibility. will may we seek the Lord. And in his work, may we seek then for the clean hands.

May we seek for that pure heart. May we seek to be seeking the Lord and to be used for him because he is the king, the king of glory.

The one who has fought the battles and who has won the war. is this king your king today? That's the all-important question.

[31 : 13] If not, please, before you go out of here, ask King Jesus to become king of your life.

That he will have the rule that your life will be lived for him. And you know that way, life takes on a new meaning and a new purpose.

May God bless us as we reflect on these things. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for the way the word describes to us and holds out for us what Christ has done for us.

May we rejoice in the great King, King Jesus. May we have this sense of awe and wonder that we have been recipients of his grace.

Lord, bless us and do us good. Encourage us as we go forward. May we go forward looking into Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith.

[32 : 19] Bless us, take us all home safely. Watch over us because the conditions are so slippery in their foot. We pray to keep every feet, all feet, from falling.

Grant us grace, we pray, taking away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing from the Scottish Psalter in this particular psalm and we'll sing from verse 1.