

The Earth Belongs Unto The Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn just for a very short time to the chapter we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 24. Read at 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 waters, 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, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

He will receive blessings from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Now, we know that Psalm 22, 23 and 24 are Psalms that go together and a lot of people describe them in different ways.

Psalm 22, the focus is on the suffering saviour. Psalm 23, the focus is on the good shepherd. And Psalm 24, the focus is on the exalted king.

[1 : 1 4] Again, some people look on it this way. They say Psalm 22 is a cross. Psalm 23 is a crook. And Psalm 24 is a crown.

I suppose there's lots of different titles that we can give that. A lot of people think that this psalm was a psalm that was written at the time celebrating bringing back the Ark of the Covenant.

And back to us, remember how at the time of Eli, how the Ark had been taken out in that battle against the Philistines and the Ark had been captured.

And it, of course, had caused fearful consternation and distress amongst the Israelites. But in the time of David, of course, remember how the Ark was eventually brought back.

And some people think that this, quite a lot of people think that this psalm was a psalm that came around that particular time. And as we remember, the Ark was powerfully symbolic for the Jews because it symbolized the presence of God amongst them.

[2 : 2 0] And the Ark, remember, was in the Holy of Holies, in the most holy place. It was that only the high priest was allowed in there once a year.

And remember, there are different times when the significance of the Ark is highlighted. One is when Israel, remember, crossed the Jordan. And when they entered into the Promised Land.

And the Ark was carried by the priests way out in front. Not directly in front, but way out ahead. And so that it was so far ahead that everybody could see it.

And there's a great lesson there for us that as we follow the Lord, it's the Lord we follow, not one another. Because if the Ark had been right in front, if the priests had just been walking in front of all the people as they walked, then only those at the front could see the Ark.

And so all who were following on would be just following the other people. But the Ark was so far ahead that all who were following on were able to see it.

[3 : 28] And that's how we follow the Lord. We walk together. We follow the Lord together. But our focus is always to be upon him, not upon one another. As you remember, the Ark itself was just a box covered on all sides with gold.

And Hebrews, in chapter 9, tells us about the Ark. That inside there was a golden urn with a manna. There was Aaron's rod that had budded.

And there were the Ten Commandments. These three things inside. And the manna to remind Israel of God's provision for them through the wilderness. The rod reminding them of God's power.

And the commandments reminding them of God's law. And really, these things are very central and important to ourselves as well. Because as we journey through this world, God always wants us to remember his provision for us.

It's one of the things, remember how he said to Israel, remember the way the Lord led you these years and how he humbled you these 40 years in the wilderness. And God does that. But at the same time as humbling us and leading us through the wilderness, our own personal wildernesses, he's making provision for us.

[4 : 46] There will always be provision. And he also demonstrates his power. He demonstrated his power in saving us. And he continues to demonstrate his power. And through his word, he has given us the direction through his law, through his word.

So we have all these things. And then we remember on the lid of the ark, there was where we had the mercy seat. And remember that it was on that, on the great day of atonement, that the blood was sprinkled.

The high priest would enter into the holy of holies and sprinkle the blood. There were the cherubims facing one another on the top of the ark, the mercy seat.

And the blood would be sprinkled on there. And again, there was this reminder to the Israelites that God was such a holy God that he couldn't turn a blind eye to sin.

And we've got to remember that as well. God cannot turn a blind eye to sin. He cannot ignore it or pretend that it's not there or turn away from it. But the ark also reminds us, and the great day of atonement reminds us, that God is a God of grace and mercy and forgiveness.

[5 : 59] And that when atonement is made in his way, in the provision that he has made, then he does turn away from sin. Because atonement has been made.

Provision has been made. And of course, that is what has been done in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. And so this psalm had huge significance for the Jews.

Now right at the very beginning of the psalm, we are reminded here that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And that's one of the things that we have to remember. That not only is God creator of this world, but he is the owner of this world.

That's what it tells us. That the earth is the Lord's. And the fullness thereof. The fullness means that everything in this world belongs to him.

All the riches of this world. All the gold. All the silver. All the oil. All the gas. All the harvests of this world.

[7 : 02] Everything. That's what it's speaking about. All that is in this world. It is his. He is the owner of it. And that's something I think we've always got to remember.

That he governs this world. That he rules over it. Every single day he is God over all. But we have been given the responsibility of caring for this world.

We were told at the very beginning to have dominion. We're told to subdue. We're told to replenish the earth. There were these commands given. Not to exploit, but to use wisely.

Wisdom was needed. And there were all. That's why this earth is full of all these resources. Not for man's greed, but for man's good.

And that's what's gone wrong with this world. There is more than sufficient in the fullness of what God has provided in this world for every single person.

[8 : 01] Even although there are billions of people. The reason why there is so much starvation and so much that is wrong. It's because of man's lust.

Man's greed. And that there's so many. So many people are starving because of wars which have come about through man's greed. So we can never. People sometimes say, oh, what kind of God?

God, the God of heaven and earth who made this world, made it full of resources sufficient for the duration of this world.

But it's through our abuse of it in all its various ways and forms. And God will require an account of everybody at the end of the day for all that they've done with everything that he has provided.

And we've got to remember that everything is the Lord's. And when God said over everything, that it was very good.

[9 : 02] So it says, the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof and the world and those who dwell therein. So everybody belongs to the Lord, those who dwell therein.

And that is why in Psalm 100 we're told, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. And remember it says, all people that on earth do dwell.

Yes, the Christian. Yes, the followers of the Lord. But not only them. All people. Everywhere. Without exception. And that's one of the questions that the Lord will ask people on that great day.

Why didn't you sing praise to me? Why didn't you acknowledge my authority? Why didn't you acknowledge that I was the one who brought you into being, who measured the length of your days, who indeed enabled you to live, to move and have your being, and you never acknowledged me.

It is one of the things, unless a person finds salvation in Jesus Christ, that people will be condemned for. It's a refusal to do this very thing. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

[10 : 13] And so we should, for all his gracious provision to us. And then we see that it says here, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

Now, of course, that takes us back to Genesis chapter 1, 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. So the sea is something that we see how God's control over the sea.

Now, again, we're not going to go down there, but there is so much that we could think of with regarding to the reference of sea. And from the very creation into revelation, where it tells us there shall be no more sea.

But the sea was often a picture of threat. You go to Psalm 46 and we see this picture of the earth in upheaval and the seas roaring and raging.

[11 : 17] The sea is a picture of restlessness. We read about that in Isaiah chapter 57. The wicked are described like the tossing sea, where they cannot be quiet.

There is no peace for the wicked. In fact, the heathen long ago had a dread of the sea. But the Bible reminds us that the sea belongs to the Lord.

It's all his. And he has set a bound for the sea. Because the Lord says, this far and no further. It's amazing how he has set bounds so that the sea cannot pass.

Of course, we know that there are times where there's been tsunamis and such like. But the Lord will never again flood the world as he did at the flood.

He has said that. Although in parts here and there, there have been places destroyed through flooding. In local places and there have been tsunamis.

[12 : 20] But there will never be a global flood again. There's going to be a global fire. But not a global flood. And so the Lord has set bounds thus far and no further.

But again, as we look at this Psalm, we can see the Lord Jesus Christ throughout. And Jesus Christ, of course, was at the very center of this whole universe.

He was involved in the creation of this world. Without him, nothing that was made, but was made with him. And so we find Jesus very clearly here.

And people look at verse 3 in two ways. Some see this as a very clear reference to the Lord Jesus. You can see it both towards Jesus Christ very clearly, but also a picture of the believer.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? And here we seem to have a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ ascending, as it were, into the hill of God.

[13 : 25] Into the place of worship. Standing there in the place of worship. We're given here almost a picture of a perfect person. Someone whose hands are clean and his heart is pure.

Who does not lift up his soul to what is false. Who does not swear deceitfully. Here is somebody who is absolutely a wonderful person. And Jesus has ascended up into the hill of God.

He is the one who did everything for us. Before he could ascend, he had, of course, to descend. And you know the amazing thing is he descended and he went up another hill.

Not the hill of God. He went up the hill of the curse. He went up a hill carrying a cross. Up the hill of Calvary. And there he was put to death for us.

In order that we may ascend the hill of God. Not one of us could ascend the hill of God were it not for the fact that Christ first descended and ascended in order to make our ascent possible.

[14 : 32] But also we see, we believe that now there comes this picture of the believer. And one of the things that, when you see that, who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in his holy place?

It's actually a very solemn thing to come into the presence of God in worship. We can come in and I know we have an amazing freedom.

And if we were to go back to the Old Testament, that's one of the things that God brought before the Old Testament church was his holiness.

And of how it was a fearful thing to approach the living God. It was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And there was this incredible sense of blood.

Blood everywhere. And they were aware, particularly the Israelites journeying through the wilderness, of God as a consuming fire. They saw evidence of his majesty, of his might, of his wrath.

[15 : 38] They saw pictures, evidences of that. And so there were times that the Old Testament church were so aware of this. Sometimes the New Testament church and where we are, we forget the holiness of God.

We forget sometimes the reverence that is really required as we come into his presence. Because we are meeting the God of a holiness we cannot even begin to comprehend.

You know, there are times you try and understand and try and grasp something of the incredible purity and holiness of God.

And it goes beyond you because we are sinners. We can't. But God, this is what God requires. And were it not for what Jesus Christ did for us, we couldn't approach him.

It would be impossible. But that way has been made over to us. And while we have this wonderful freedom today, where we can come right in immediately, straight into the presence of God, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, that sometimes we can become so used to it, so blasé, that sometimes we don't appreciate just what it is we're doing and who it is that we're worshipping.

[17 : 03] So there is this before us, the importance of recognizing his holiness. And again, we see something of the importance of the integrity, the honesty that should be about the Christian.

Somebody whose hands are clean and whose heart is pure. If you were to go up to Buckingham Palace, and there's the Duke of Edinburgh and the Queen, and you were to be the maid or butler or whatever, and you were going to serve them food, you wouldn't come in from gardening, straight in from doing some gardening or pottering about in the earth or something, and then going straight in and bringing them food with your hands clattered in mud.

It just would not be allowed. Because there has to be, you can almost see them with their white gloves and everything, this sense of, in the presence of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, there has to be this sense of cleanness.

And how much more when we present ourselves before the King of Glory. So there has to be this sense of honesty and integrity and cleanliness and purity.

And that's what makes it so difficult sometimes for us, because is it not true sometimes we come in to worship God, and we feel sometimes we come in all right, or we think we're all right, but it's when we come under His Word, the arrows of the King begin to hit us.

[18 : 40] And we begin to think, oh, I just feel so unclean. I feel so impure. And you begin to think over your sin, and what you've said, and what you've done, and who you are.

But how thankful that there is one who is clean and one who is pure altogether, and He stands between you and the Holy God.

And you go to Him again and say, oh, Lord, forgive me. You feel like the disciples getting their feet washed. Remember how the Lord said to Jesus, Jesus said to Peter, sorry, you know, there is only one full washing needed, but you need your feet washed again and again.

And that's how it is with ourselves. We need this daily cleansing. Yes, there's a once and for all cleansing in Jesus Christ by the blood where we are made right with God through Jesus Christ.

But we need to be coming to Him daily, again and again and again and again, saying, Lord, forgive me. Lord, cleanse me from my sin.

[19 : 52] David was a good man. David was an exceptional believer. But you go to Psalm 32 and go to Psalm 51, and you see there a man who has discovered his sin.

A mature Christian. A wonderful Christian. But he's crying to the Lord, for that forgiveness. Again and again and again. And so do you and so do I.

And we see then the result of that. He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of salvation. That is the result of this.

Blessing from the Lord. And you know, that's one of the wonderful things about the Christian faith. It's a receiving faith. Everything is receiving. We are receiving from the Lord all the time.

Gift upon gift upon gift. Not just the gift of salvation, which of course is the most wonderful gift of all. But daily, his benefits. We are receiving from him all the time.

[20 : 57] The riches of his grace. Over and over and over and over again. And then in verse 6, just as we conclude, it says, Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Esau received his portion, which was of the earth. Jacob was the one who wrestled. He wrestled and he wrestled. And he says, Lord, do not let me go.

Do not let me go without blessing me. The Lord blessed him. With his favor. He was blessed of the Lord.

And the Lord will bless you as well. And I think sometimes we forget just how wonderful it is to be blessed. The enriching experience. So often we say, Lord, bless me. But do we really understand what blessing is?

Do you know, it's a wonderful, wonderful thing to be the recipient of God's blessing. And we are. Sometimes we just take it for granted.

[22 : 11] But as we belong, as we are of the seed of Jacob, as we are part by the spiritual seed, we too will inherit this blessing. And so we are able to, through Jesus, ascend to the hill of God.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray to bless us, giving thanks for all your mercy and your grace and your love, your goodness, upholding us and keeping us along the way.

As we journey and are coming near the end of another year, we again marvel at your goodness. Through the year, there have been disappointments, there have been bereavements, there have been things that have hurt us and confused us.

But still, Lord, you're with us. And constantly we will go on in strength of God the Lord. And we pray that you will bless our homes, our families and all whom we love.

Lord, pour down your salvation upon those who have not yet received it. May you give the great gift of salvation into our families, to those tonight who are still without Jesus.

[23 : 19] Lord, bless, we pray, and watch over all whom we love. Keep them all safe. Do us all good, particularly on such a stormy night. And grant us your grace, we pray, forgiving us our every sin.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.