

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Comments from Book 1 of the Psalms: Psalm 24

Long before I'd given much thought to the book of Psalms, a Christian friend of mine invited me to go with him to visit an old Christian gentleman who had just returned home from hospital. He had had a serious operation. It was thought that he might be feeling lonely, even depressed. On arrival, we were shown into the room where he was sitting quietly. As soon as he saw us, his face burst into a huge smile. Before we could even ask how he was, this is what he said:

*"Hosts of flowers, hosts of trees
Hosts of birds and hosts of bees
Hosts of fishes, hosts of frogs
Hosts of cats and hosts of dogs
And He's the Lord of them all."*

My first reaction was that perhaps his mind had become unhinged. Or, perhaps, he was still under the effect of the anaesthetic. Being young and inexperienced, I thought it would be best if I said nothing and took my cue from my friend, who was much older, wiser and more experienced than me. I was absolutely fascinated. These two very sober men, not flamboyant or showy in any way, launched into an animated conversation about Psalm 24. You know, for most of us, we would learn much more if we talked less and listened more. When we do so, the impression we gain is often much more important than any detailed knowledge we acquire. Certainly, on that day, I learned the value of listening to those whose minds are formed and whose lives are fashioned by what the Bible says about the Lord Jesus.

A gem always looks best in a setting specially designed for it and against a background, which shows its beauty to best effect. Certainly, Psalm 24 is a very good example of this principle. It is the climax of a trilogy of Psalms, 22, 23 and 24, which are connected together by a common theme. They were written about a thousand years before Jesus was born into the world. Up to a point, they said things that were true at the time, of people who lived at the time. Yet, they say things that would only be fulfilled completely by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Messiah of Israel, Saviour of the world.

Over the years, many ways of connecting these three Psalms have been expressed. Let us go over a few of them. They will attune our minds for thinking about the detail of Psalm 24.

Psalm 22 presents the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd Who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Psalm 23 presents Him as the Great Shepherd of the sheep. (Hebrews 13:20). He is alive from among the dead, caring for His own till He takes them home to heaven, to be with Him forever.

Psalm 24 presents Him as The Chief Shepherd, Who will one day return to set up His kingdom on earth. He will then reward those who have acted as under shepherds, caring for His sheep in the absence of The Chief Shepherd, and under His guidance. (1 Peter 5:4).

Psalm 22 looks at the Lord Jesus as the Great Substitute,

Psalm 23 looks at the Lord Jesus as The Great Shepherd and

Psalm 24 looks at the Lord Jesus as The Great Sovereign.

Psalm 22 looks initially and primarily at the past.

Psalm 23 looks mainly at the present.

Psalm 24 looks mainly at the future.

All tell us about the Lord Jesus, Who is the same, yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

In Psalm 22, the Saviour's cross is prominent.

In Psalm 23, the Shepherd's Crook is prominent.

In Psalm 24, the Sovereign's Sceptre is prominent.

And so we might go on. Thinking of them as a set, it is significant that Psalm 22 begins with a cry of anguish. Psalm 24 ends with a cry of triumph. Psalm 22 is a solemn meditation on the sufferings of Christ. Psalm 24 is a joyous celebration of the glory of Christ. In case we are dazzled by the brilliant detail of these Psalms, let us pause a moment, let us think about the overall message. There was a time in the history of the world when the Son of God came into the world, born a babe at Bethlehem. He grew up, lived a perfect life, and suffered incredibly on the cross. He was marked out as The Lamb of God, the bearer away of the sin of the world. (John 1:29). Psalm 22 spells out the awesome detail of those terrible sufferings He endured. He lived on earth. He died. He rose again. He ascended back to heaven. He now lives in heaven. He cares for those on earth who have trusted Him as Saviour. Their sins are forgiven. Their ultimate place in heaven is assured, reserved for them. In the meantime, they are encouraged to cast their every care upon Him, because He careth for them, as we read in 1 Peter 5:7. Psalm 23 speaks about the enjoyment of that care in a very poetic, romantic, way. That's why the picture of a sheep is introduced. Our Saviour looks after us and cares for us as a true shepherd cares for his sheep.

One day, Jesus will come again as He said He would. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also." (John 14:3). Then, after that, He will establish a righteous kingdom on earth, as the Bible says. "God has appointed a day in which He will rule the world in righteousness by that man whom He has ordained whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). A large proportion of the Bible is taken up with this. God will not allow things to go on in their present way for ever. He will not allow the righteous to suffer forever. He will not allow the wicked to prosper forever. There have been many styles and forms of governments and kingdoms set up in the world over many centuries. But, God has decreed that He will, one day, very soon we believe, set up a kingdom the like of which, in fullness, has never been seen before.

There have been little pictures, indications, of the kind of kingdom that God has in mind. The Kingdom of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, one man in absolute control, with undisputed sway, shows one feature. The victorious reign of King David, the peace and prosperity of the reign of King Solomon, give other features. But only when Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords shall all these things be true at the same time, and of the same one person. Surely, He will reign with supreme authority, like Nebuchadnezzar did for a while. Surely, He will be victorious in dealing with His enemies, as was David. Surely, His reign will be one of peace, plenty and prosperity, as was King Solomon's. But all these things, seen fleetingly and fitfully in brief, occasional intervals in individuals here and there, will be seen fully and continuously in the Lord Jesus for a full cycle of time, a full thousand years, as we read in Revelation 20:1-6.

Psalm 24 is one of the many portions of the Bible that tell us what things will be like then. Let us think about it for a few minutes. Overall, it is a picture of the King, God's King, coming into His Kingdom, taking up the reins of government. Immediately, in verse 1, He lays claim to the whole earth, and all who live in it. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." Verse 2 tells us that this King has a right to lay claim to the whole earth, because He created it. "He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods."

Incidentally, this statement teaches us that when He made the world, He did so in an orderly, balanced way. There is a definite relation between sea and land, cold and heat, the level of rainfall and all that keeps creation in proper balance. Any present day imbalance in God's fair creation, such as the so-called greenhouse effect, is entirely due to the activities of sinful man. That imbalance will continue until Christ comes to restore the proper balance in creation and in the activities of men. That's what the prophet Isaiah was referring to in chapter 32 of his prophecy. "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness."

Other than being the Creator, what sort of person is this coming King? What qualifications are necessary in the King of such a Kingdom? Verses 3 and 4 tell us, although the statements are made in a very subtle manner. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" That is, "Who is fit to be God's anointed king? Who has the moral right to the throne of power?" Before giving the answer, another question is posed. "Who shall stand in His holy place?" That is, who has the equally vital right to represent the people in the presence of God, that is, to be their priest? If He has the official right to function as King and Priest, He must also have the moral right to do so. In verse 4 it is put this way. "He hath clean hands." (First lived a clean life on earth). No one could fairly point the finger of accusation against Him. There was no skeleton in His cupboard, to be revealed by some publicity seeking opponent. They tried, of course. His enemies ensured that every possible taunt was hurled at Him during that terrible, illegal, mock so-called trial to which He was subjected. Still, no righteous accusation could be upheld or proven. His life was blameless. Now why was that true? The same verse gives the answer. "He hath a pure heart." His life was blameless, outwardly, because He was pure, inwardly. His actions were beyond reproach. "Which of you convinceth Me of sin," He said on one occasion. "I am a man who has told you the truth," He said on another. He could speak fearlessly in this manner because His thought and motives were completely pure. He could honestly say, as He did, "I am meek and lowly in heart."

What has God in mind for such a person, such a King? Listen to what verse 5 has to say about it. "He shall receive the blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of His salvation." In effect, God says, "Nothing will be too good for such a man." He has lived and worked so completely according to God's will that God Himself will ensure that He shall have the very best of everything. The whole world will applaud such a King. Israel, at the heart and very centre of

God's activities on earth! The Gentiles, who will also be blessed indirectly, through Israel at that time! All will applaud God's King, God's rule, God's Christ.

In anticipation of the grand entrance of such a King into such a Kingdom, the rapturous welcome rings out. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." I am aware that some look at this statement as depicting the welcome that the Lord Jesus receives when He went back into heaven after His death, resurrection and ascension. I am totally in sympathy with the thought that the Lord Jesus deserved and received the fullest and highest acclaim when He went back from earth to heaven. As we read in 1 Timothy 3:16, "He was received up in glory" That is, He deserved and received a glorious reception. However, such a reading does not harmonise at all with the obvious connection between these three Psalms 22, 23, and 24. This acclaim is much more clearly linked with what we read about in Revelation 19:11-16.

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and He that sat upon Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war." His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. "And He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood: and His name is called the Word of God." And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God." And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."

As we read in the Jude 14-15, "Behold, the Lord cometh, with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement upon all." Luke 21:26-27 tell us, "the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in power and great glory. Of course, it is relatively easy for us, three thousand years after the psalm was written, to see in these verses things that would not possibly have been understood by those who were alive at the time. Taking account of that, we can perhaps well understand the puzzlement of those who heard or read the psalm. "Who is this King of Glory?" Can He be identified? Oh, yes! Of course He can! "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." The One Who fought the foe! In the words of SW Gandy,

*"His be the Victor's name
Who fought the fight alone."*

Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, the One Who has every resource at His disposal, He is the King of Glory. He has defeated the enemies of God and His Christ. He has every resource at His command. He is all glorious. And His Name is Jesus. "Once, in the end of the age ... He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Hebrews 9:26). "He died for our sins according to the scriptures; and...He was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Soon He will come again. The first time He came, it was in humility and in lowliness. He came to be our Saviour. In fulfilment of Psalm 24, He will come a second time, but this time in power and great glory. He will put right all the things presently suffered in this poor, ungodly, Christless world. He will reign in righteousness for a thousand years, as scripture says He will. At that time, it will be obligatory to yield to Him. Every knee shall bow to Him. Every tongue shall acknowledge Him to be Lord. God has said so. He will bring it to pass.

We have the opportunity now to trust Him as Saviour. We have the privilege now to call Him Lord. Our sins will be forgiven. Our place in heaven will be assured. Let us trust Him now, and serve Him faithfully, and a place of honour in the millennial reign of Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be our bright future prospect.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we are glad to learn from scripture that the day will soon dawn when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom in power and great glory. Help us, Lord, in the meantime, to be true and faithful while we wait for Thee to come. Amen.

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