

Psalm 24: Seeking the Lord

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the necessity of purity and discipline in seeking the Lord, highlighting the church's role in welcoming the King of Glory into the world.

Scripture: Psalm 24:1

Topics: "Purity of Heart", "Seeking God"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the profound truth that the earth and all its inhabitants belong to the Lord, as He is the Creator. He challenges believers to recognize their role in proclaiming this truth and ascending the hill of the Lord with clean hands and pure hearts. Katz highlights the necessity of ongoing purification and the importance of the church as the gate through which the King of Glory enters. He warns against the distractions and vanities that hinder our pursuit of God, urging a disciplined and sincere seeking of His face. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a generation that seeks the Lord, recognizing that the earth is the Lord's and that our lives must reflect this reality.

Transcript

"The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers" (vs. 1-2). In other words, the earth and all that dwell on it belong to the Lord because He is the Creator of both. God owns what He originates; it belongs to Him for His own purposes. Imagine announcing to mankind that their little pieces of territory to which they have given their national name are really the Lord's, and that the nations were established for His own purposes rather than their own.

Those that dwell in the nations are dwelling there for God's sake. This foundational truth will take a profound boldness to proclaim. The psalmist talks about the earth being "founded upon the seas and established upon the rivers." It sounds like poetry, but there is an insightful truth represented here. The rivers (floods) and the seas are frequently symbolic of the primordial and ancient enemies of God. The fact that He has established something upon them suggests His triumph over every adverse force that is opposed to God.

His own majesty has proven victorious over the powers of darkness, who constantly contend with God as to whose earth this really is. We must be careful not to allow this concept to become a piece of technical information. We have to fight for the significance of the earth being the Lord's, and those that dwell in it, and not allow it to be reduced by the world to a commonplace. Amongst other things, this psalm is given to

elevate the understanding of the church into the place of God's intention, and maybe that is why it begins with this foundational statement, and continues on with: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?

And who may stand in His holy place?" (vs. 3). Unless a deep-rooted understanding of God as Creator is foundational to our own being, there can be no ascending of this hill. It is more than subscribing to the truth of the earth and the world being the Lord's; it is abiding in that reality, and then, from that place, we can talk about ascending the hill of the Lord. The pronoun who as in "who may ascend the hill...and who may stand" implies that there are not many. It is almost like God is laying out a challenge, "Who dares ascend this hill?"

And then the requirement is given: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood (vanity - alt. reading), and has not sworn deceitfully" (vs. 4). Clean hands are something external; a pure heart is something internal. The fundamental requirement for anyone to ascend is this minimal condition. Have our hands trafficked in things that are offensive in God's sight? Do we pray, "Purify my heart as You are pure"? That always ought to be a daily prayer.

There is an ongoing process of purification because there are daily assaults against purity of heart. One of the principal places where the purifying process of God takes place is in the midst of the brethren. It is available to us in the relationships that God has given in the organic reality of what is called the church. In the church, God is given opportunity to confront us through His body; He identifies and shows us the kinds of things that compromise purity of heart. This can take place anytime the word of God is proclaimed, be it in a Bible study, a Sunday morning service, a chance conversation.

It is in the church that we are made conscious of where we are impure, and we can then receive the correction and exhortation that make for a pure heart. This is one of God's sublime provisions, and we need to recognize it as such and thank Him for it. The book of Proverbs is full of references to those who are grateful for the rebuke, the correction, and the chastisement of God. Only fools and scoffers are averse to being corrected. But a true believer recognizes that this is a very great and necessary provision from God.

A pure heart means that there is no admixture in it. There are legions of things that find sway with us: mixed motivations and desires, mixed ambitions, the disdain and being critical of others or of other ministries. This is a delicate matter, and I always have a deep reserve when a subject comes up by which other believers or ministries are being discussed. We live in an age of deception, and to some degree we necessarily need to ferret out and speak often one to another in the fear of the Lord about those things that are deceptive.

In doing so, there is always the risk of us becoming contaminated. There is always an insidious temptation to exalt ourselves at the expense of another, which requires us to examine our own hearts and to be guarded. This is the kind of careful attention a pure heart requires. What shall we say about "not lifting up one's soul unto vanity"? We seem always to have two choices: either we lift up our soul unto the Lord, or we lift it up unto vanity. But we are the key for the thing to which we allow our souls to be engaged.

Vanity means that which is vain, that which does not profit. For those who want to ascend this mount, it is not just the issue of giving our soul over to that which is easily recognizable as carnal. Paradoxically, we will more likely succumb to vanity in the realm of what seems to be "scriptural" and "spiritual" endeavors. For example, we can delight in the delving into the books of Daniel and Revelation and the examination of prophecy - all valid occupations in themselves. Even though it is legitimate and biblical, and deserves

examination, yet if it is a subtle means by which our own soul is being lifted up for a gratification that would not come to us through carnality, then it is a vain pursuit.

There is something in man that enjoys giving his soul over to biblical things for a particular delight that he might obtain from that very giving. This is how strenuous and how exacting the ascent must be. Ascent means going up against gravity, and against every force that wants to keep us at an earthly plain. Those who can ascend the holy hill of God, and who can stand before the Lord, are those who are this exacting and careful about what they give their souls to. We must not be ruled by our affinities, or give our souls to them because of a satisfaction that we desire to obtain.

The Lord Himself has to guide us, and we have to be careful in the ascent, because the question still is: "Who may ascend?" Who is that careful and who is that concerned about his soul? "Swearing deceitfully" does not merely mean foul language coming out of our mouth, or taking the Lord's name in vain. Those are the most blatant and evident forms of swearing deceitfully. Any use of language that is false, though correct, but is used for a false end, is a swearing deceitfully.

It is a misuse of the privilege of speaking and the use of words. The one who wants to ascend the hill of God has got to be just as careful about what he speaks as about what his soul delights in. That is why there are only a few who will ascend to that holy place. As we shall see later, this is not a matter of mere individuals obtaining an ultimate place of desire before God; it is the issue of opening the gate that the "King of Glory might come in." That is how Psalm 24 ends.

It begins with "The earth is the Lord's" but it ends with the King of Glory standing at the gate. He is not yet able to come in, for the implication is, "Who can ascend to the hill to throw the bolt that opens the gate that the King of Glory might come in? Whose hands are clean, and whose heart is pure to ascend up to that place?" For the issue of the King of Glory's coming is not just His own desire and satisfaction, but salvation for the world. The King of Glory is waiting at the gate, but it is the gate that forbids the entry.

We need to see the connection here. The key to the opening of the gate is addressed in the last verses of this psalm: "Lift up your heads, O gates and be lifted up, O ancient (everlasting) doors that the King of glory may come in" (vs.7). Is God speaking to some inanimate substance? Is He actually talking to a literal gate made of iron, a door made of wood? Or is there a way of understanding this verse that intimates that we, as the church, are the gate. God seems to use metaphorical language as if we ourselves are the gate and the door to His entry.

If that is so, then the church is the key to the coming of the Lord Himself as the King of Glory into His own earth. It seems that the Lord has restricted Himself, waiting for a gate that can be opened, a door that can be opened by those who constitute that gate or door. Our coming into this kind of purpose with the Lord is therefore the issue of the King of Glory coming in. What makes Him the King of Glory is that He is willing to limit Himself, to wait for, and to trust those who will ascend that hill.

He could do it without us, but that which makes God glorious is His employment of us. So, this will take vigilance; it is a sacrifice, an offering; it is the Cross. But the end result is the King of Glory coming in to bless a mankind that does not know that the earth is the Lord's, and the world, and them that dwell in it. "This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Thy face - even Jacob" (vs.6). The word "generation" typically means a forty-year span. But in this context, it means a certain type or a particular quality of individual.

The one who will ascend is the same one who is going to seek the Lord. My own experience in seeking the Lord tells me that there is no more strenuous activity before us as believers. It is as if every single thing conspires against it. I am not just talking about phones ringing and other distractions; our own flesh is resistant and unwilling. And then God goes even further: "Seek My face." Well, no one sees the face of God and lives. This is an invitation to death. In fact, if you seek the Lord in this way, it is an invitation to death!

To seek the Lord is to have something happen to your own soul, something that takes place in seeking. The very engagement and pursuit of the seeking has the potential to purify the soul. Could our generally dull condition be attributed to the lack of effort to ascend the holy hill and to seek the Lord? Note that it does not say to seek the Lord for any benefit; it says to seek Him. There is seeking and there is seeking, and for most of us, if we are engaged in any seeking at all, it is because we are faced with problems, issues, and needs that we want the Lord to answer and to solve.

Seeking God, seeking His face is a quality of seeking beyond the things that pertain to our need, and few there be that will seek the Lord for Himself alone. And that is primarily why God says: "This is the generation, this is that kind of believer that will ascend (attain) to the holy hill." And meanwhile, the King of glory waits for just that fulfillment. To seek the Lord is going to take ruthlessness against the flesh, against laziness, against indifference, against casualness and spiritual self-satisfaction.

Maybe we are too content with ourselves as we are, or we think we have arrived at some spiritual state whereby seeking is no longer required. We need, therefore, to pray for a divine dissatisfaction with where we are at in order to come into that true place that will release the King of Glory to come in. If we have not a discipline in other and ordinary aspects of our life, we are going to find a discipline for this? There is very little requirement for discipline in our life.

But the root of "disciple" is the same as the root "discipline." You cannot be a disciple without some measure of order, structure, attention, devotion, and consecration. These are all disciplines against a flesh that is slothful, lazy, indifferent, and casual. Discipline is a requirement to ascending this mount, over and against every impulse that wants to keep us down. It is not only the device and stratagem of the enemy to keep our spiritual life to a minimum, but it will also keep the King of Glory from coming in.

"Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (vs. 8). He is strong and mighty, but He will not break the door down on the basis of His might and strength. He waits at the gate, and at the door, for that one whose hands are clean, and who can ascend the mount and throw the bolt that allows the King of Glory to come in. This is exactly what glorifies God; that He does not employ His might and strength to obtain His ends. He waits for us to participate with Him - for that is what glorifies Him.

There is no visible glory without a temple. God requires a housing; we are that structure. There is no glorifying of God in His coming into the earth except that it has come through the instruments of His own choice - beggars that He has taken off of garbage dumps. He is glorified by what He performs and achieves through those whom He has saved. Karl Barth, the Swiss theologian asks, "This is the right word, but why does it enlighten us so faintly? Why does it not penetrate our ears and issue from our lips?"

Why do we not ascend and stand, even amidst the needs that surround us in the holy place? Why is it not true and real to us? Why do we not live by the word, 'The earth is the Lords'? Why then do we live as though it is not true if it is true? How little we seem to be able to say to the great need and darkness of our

times that the earth is the Lord's. Even our Christian words, our sermons, our observations are helpless, faltering, and lacking in light and spirit. The saddest part of all is that we speak and hear the word of God as if it were a mere word of man; it no longer possesses its unique power and meaning."

Barth continues, "So who will ascend the hill of the Lord, and who is the generation of them that seek after Him, who seek His face? Such zealous striving after truth or much praying is in vain, because we will never by these ways make it right with God. The holiest thing is lacking, even though we talk much about it. That deep respect for God's majesty, that real reverent respect is wanting...There is wanting that earnest prerequisite of the knowledge of God, not of what I think, intend and say, but only His name, His kingdom, His will...And when that is wanting, it is not merely something that is wanting, but everything is wanting.

When that is wanting, nothing will succeed; everything is loose and empty doctrine even if it be ten-fold true." Only a pure heart can even desire to ascend. If we do not have the desire, it is the ipso facto evidence that our hearts are impure. If they were pure, we would have this desire of God to ascend. We have allowed a mixture of many things. Our first prayer ought to be to ask the Lord to purify our heart as He Himself is pure. We need to ask Him to purge our hearts from everything that dulls it, and keeps it from desiring what He desires.

We can barely identify correctly the issues of our heart, but we know that if we lack a desire to ascend, and we do not see ourselves as included in the "who may" then that is the evidence of impurity. I would to God that Israelis and the Palestinians would bow before these words, who are presently vying with each other over the possession of the Land. It is the Lord's, and He will give it to whom He will, when He will, and under the conditions that He will. But the very fact that they are competing and contending over it shows that they are outside the context of this statement, and they are outside of it because we as the church are outside of it.

In fact, the kind of bickering and contention that is presently going on in the Israel cannot be alleviated or be met by anything less than the revelation of God in His glory as King. No diplomacy or treaty will work; only the revelation of the God who created the earth and all that is therein, and coming as King of Glory, can bring resolution to this conflict that is threatening to tear up the Middle-East as well as the world. The issues of this age are of such a kind that only the revelation and the actual in-coming of the King in His glory can resolve them.

If God is not God and revealed in glory as Creator, and that the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, and those that dwell therein, then there is no prospect for mankind. To acknowledge God as Creator requires a submission to Him who has created. God makes the whole issue rest on the "gate" and the "door" that will be opened to allow His entry. The world does not know that the earth is the Lord's. It sees it only as a geophysical accident rather than as a result of God's creation.

Nor has the church rightly acknowledged that its own physical life is the Lord's. We are dust, and therefore we are the Lord's. We are as much His creation as the physical terra firma on which we have been placed. But if we are not living as if our bodies are the Lord's, then how should we expect the world to understand that the larger earth is the Lord's. We are a case in point. It is one thing to mentally acknowledge that this piece of earth is the Lord's, but are we living in the truth of that acknowledgment?

And that if it is His, then it is His to direct and employ, His to do with as He will. If we ourselves are usurping and controlling, and leading our own life and purpose, we are contradicting the testimony of God

with the regard to the entire earth. The earth remains, therefore, in the ignorance of whose earth it is, because we, as the church, do not testify to it that our own earth is the Lord's. I pray that we will hear this as the word of God addressed to our casual Christian mentality and attitude.

For many of us, ascending the holy hill of God has not been a priority or an intention. And yet, we can say that the redemption of mankind waits for the King of Glory to come in. He will not use His power and might to do so, but waits for the gate to be opened by only those who can ascend the hill, having the pure heart and clean hands, those who have not given themselves to vanity. It is an ultimate requirement for the church, and it is also the issue of the glory of God for mankind. They need to know that the "earth is the Lord's and those that dwell on it."

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