

'Lift Up The Gates!'

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[0 : 00] the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, you gates. Lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty. He is the King of glory. Amen.

Good morning. Let me add my welcome to Robbie's and a big thank you to Malcolm for reading. My name is Simon. I am the training minister here and it is great to be together under God's word this morning.

What do you tell yourself on the hardest of days? What words do you say to yourself when your life feels like it's on the rocks and when things feel overwhelming? What do you say to your friends and loved ones when the hard times come?

Your answer to that is going to depend on your disposition, what family you came from, what place, what culture. You might be very British, bottle it up, telling yourself to keep calm and carry on.

[1 : 07] Maybe you're just prone to verbal floods to everyone who you meet and to yourself trying to explain it to yourself again and again. Maybe you're prone to saying, woe is me. Maybe you're prone to saying, well, it could have happened to anyone.

The things we tell ourselves in those moments are often helpful, but sometimes quite destructive. Sometimes they're just the best that we can muster when we're under pressure. So how do we know what's best to say?

Can the book of Psalms tell us what to say to ourselves in those hard times? Well, I think that today's psalm is going to help us a bit, give us some much-needed wisdom on what we say to ourselves and to one another when dark days come.

Now, we often find ourselves reading psalms in isolation. We kind of just think, it's the summer, I'm going to read a psalm. Let's crack on a bit. We don't think that much, maybe, about what's coming in the psalms around the one that we're reading.

It's worth asking, how does this psalm fit with the ones around it? Maybe what is the theme in this bit of the book? Because the book of Psalms was compiled purposefully. And in the section around the psalms we're looking at today, most of these psalms are written by King David, and a lot of them are about battles and distress and turmoil.

[2 : 22] In Psalm 22, David's calling out to God for a rescue when facing insult and persecution from dangerous enemies. In Psalm 23, David spoke about the Lord being his shepherd through the valley of death.

In Psalm 25, after this, is a psalm about being guarded by the Lord in the heat of trouble. So in all of these psalms, David is seeking the Lord from a place of distress, trusting in the Lord to deliver him. And yet, in the midst of all of that, we have Psalm 24, where distress and battle are just not mentioned. They seem out of the way all of a sudden. And this psalm, I think, taps into something important.

That in the midst of fear and danger and distress, the people of the Lord are called to keep their eyes focused on God. And as we've already done in this service, we've spoken some of that call and response to each other, asking us questions and giving us answers about the truths about the Lord.

And it's some of those core truths that we're going to focus in on this morning. But before we really dig into the passage, I just want us to take seriously that this comes in the midst of distress and battle.

[3 : 31] So maybe what we need to do this morning is just to remind ourselves of some of the things that actually feel like battles in our lives and things that cause us distress, the things that have made us fear, things that we've found hard.

So I'm just going to give us a little time of quiet to just bring to our minds maybe some of the things that we've found hard in the last week or the last month, the things that are distressing us, so we can address them with the truth of this psalm.

So let's just have a little time of quiet and then I'll pray. Amen. Father, we come to this psalm as your word through which you speak.

And we ask that you would grow our view of you this morning, that we would be able to confront the heavy and hard things of this world with the truth about you.

Thank you that this is your world, that you call us to be with you, and that you promise you will one day reign victorious forever. Press those truths into our hearts and minds this morning, we pray.

[4 : 49] Amen. Now, as Alan already prayed earlier, it's just been a really significant week in the news. The sad news of the high school shooting in America, war in the Ukraine continuing, Boris Johnson's resignation, the cost of living crisis continuing, and the shocking news of the assassination of Shinzo Abe in Japan.

Due to the media coverage of the modern age, the speed at which news is circulated has just increased and increased and increased. And it can begin to feel like world-changing events are happening every hour some days.

Like people are competing for control and dominion of this world, its people and its resources. And to our eyes, it can just seem like utter chaos. Like there's no order, no direction.

And when you add to that the complexities of everyday life, of bereavement, physical mental health struggles, job losses, it can feel exhausting. We can ask the question in our hearts, is anyone in control of this world?

It seems so out of control. But in answer to that question, we have the beginning of our psalm. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

[5 : 59] Now, it would be kind of easy just to nod along and go, great, yes, the world is the Lord's, got that. But the psalms call us to slow down, to not just know, but feel the truth of something.

So let's slow down on this. The psalmist David is telling us that the earth is the Lord's, Yahweh's, the God of Israel's history, who has made promises to them. And he owns the land on which any singer of the psalm's feet stand.

And it's not that God just has control over the geography, but that everything that dwells in this world is his. That means all the natural things, the plants, the animals, the rivers, the trees, the beauty of Kelvin Grove Park all the way through to the Grand Canyon, all of it is his.

It's his park, it's his canyon, it's his stuff. Human beings may claim ownership, crown themselves kings and emperors over whatever, but it's rented space because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

And David goes on to say that that includes all of the people, everyone who has ever lived will ever live. Young and old, Scottish to Australian, committed Christian to atheist, God owns us all.

[7 : 13] And that thought should actually be quite confronting if it's true. We live in an age of seemingly endless autonomy, being told continuously that we are our own, that no one is in control except you, and no one can tell you what to do or who to be.

And yet, that bubble's totally burst by this psalm, isn't it? Our lives are not our own. You don't own your life. You never did.

You never will. No matter how much you believe otherwise, the earth is the Lord's and all who live in it. And so the automatic question is, well then, why does he have that control?

And is that a good thing? And so David picks up in the next line, verse 2, For he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. God made this world, and he set its boundaries.

He gave it firm foundations. There are clear echoes of the creation account in Genesis 1 here. God making a place not of chaos, but of order. For life to dwell and flourish.

[8 : 18] He's the source of all of it. He's the sustainer of every part. From the revolution of every atom, straight through to the heartbeat of every creature. If God stopped concentrating, we would simply cease to be.

And so as we sing this psalm, as we say it to one another, we're beginning to be reminded of just the enormity of God's own intimate and detailed care for his world.

His ownership is good news for us. So then imagine David in a time of distress. The might of enemies' armies in front of him, betrayed by friends and allies.

At those moments, he needs to remember that this earth is the Lord's and everything in it. When it seems beyond David's control, it is not beyond control of the Lord.

But also at the heights of David's reign over Israel, when there is peace and things are comfortable, this is still God's world. David may be king, but he rules over a part of God's world under God's authority.

[9 : 23] And when future Israel meet in exile, when they've lost their land, when they're in distress, they can sing to one another that even in exile, this world is the Lord's and everything in it.

And thus we too can sing to one another and say to one another that this world is not subject to total chaos. There is a God who owns it and rules it and will call people to account for how it's been used.

And so in the midst of both comfort and distress, we say the world is the Lord's and everything in it. Now, as we move on through the next bit of this psalm, we're kind of thinking about the other question.

Is it good that the Lord is in control of this world? Who is he? And there is a real sense that everyone wants to know God. Even the most hardened atheist would want to know God if he was there and meet him, even if it was just to shout at him.

So many of the chats that I have with people are all focusing on wanting to know God better, to deepen our understanding and relationship with him, to experience more of him, and to connect with him in the confusion and complexity of everyday life.

[10 : 36] So many people say that they are seeking people. They may not always be clear on what, but there is a sense of kind of moving towards God in some way. And so the question becomes, if there is a God, how then do we meet him?

And what does he want from us? And naturally, that's where the psalm goes next. And David picks that up in verse 3 in the form of a double question. In twinning mountain and holy place there, David's bringing the people who sing the psalm and us to think about the Exodus.

Moses' many, many trips up and down the mountain to meet with God in his holy presence. And the big question that is asked by the first five books of the Bible really ends up becoming, how can we make it up the mountain of the Lord?

How is any human being who is sinful going to have access to his holy presence? This also brings to mind the idea of tabernacle and temple. That's all bound up in this.

David seeks to build a place for the Lord while he reigns as king. And the answer to verse 3's question is drawn out for verses 4, 5, and 6. The first answer, in some ways the title answer, is who may stand in his holy place?

[11 : 55] The one who has clean hands and a pure heart. Now if you had that alone, you might think the psalm was a little hopeless really. Because as we all know too well, none of us could be the who in answer to that question.

But the psalm goes on to flesh out that answer somewhat. To settle some of our fears. Who are these pure people? Well first, they are those who do not trust in idols or worship false gods.

Again, we need to stop our knee-jerk reactions in psalms really, to kind of just blaze past the stuff we think we know. We probably haven't found ourselves bowing down to any statues recently.

But that doesn't mean that the directions of our hearts, that our trust is in the Lord and focused on him. It doesn't mean that we see what is valuable as something from him.

All our hearts are susceptible to trusting in anything, and if we're honest, everything else. And that's our big problem. We're not drawn often to worshipping the Lord.

[12 : 58] We have to fight for that. And so it seems by the end of verse 4, things might not be better but worse. Pure hands, pure heart, no trust in anything but God.

I'm beginning to feel a little hopeless. How could I ever make it into the presence of the Lord? But then, verse 5 and 6. They talk about the people who will make it into his presence, and it says, They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from God their Savior.

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. So who may ascend and stand in the presence of a holy God? The people who seek him.

The ones he has saved. Pulling out another reference from the Old Testament, God is mentioned as the God of Jacob. The God who made promises to Israel's founding fathers, who promised them land and blessing and future, and his presence with them.

And really, the only thing that sets Israel apart is their relationship with this God. That he has been their Savior. That those who have sought him have found him to be faithful.

[14:07] And their faith has been vindicated by salvation and blessing. And the language moves our thoughts from just a singular person to a collective people.

David calls us to be the generation of those who seek him. It's not just one generation in time, but a generation of people. And so in the end, the answer to the question of access of God's holy place in verse 3 is that it will be for those whose trust is in the Lord, and who seek blessing from him.

They are the ones that will be welcomed into his presence. And in saying or singing that question, responding with this answer, you can imagine Israelites being reminded both of the importance of a single-minded devotion to God, but also of his devoted faithfulness to them in their history.

And so any singer of this psalm is reminded of his faithfulness, but also of the need for devotion to him. But even in David's day, that holy place still seems far off.

That opportunity to meet with God still seems separate. That ability to address the problems of our world still seems slightly far away. Israel worshiped a God at a temple, but many people will never make anyone near the center of that temple.

[15:25] But we, reflecting on this from our side of history, past the cross, can see how God chose to answer this question. Who will make it up the mountain of the Lord?

He will stand in his presence. Well, in the end, how God's people would be saved, how they would be vindicated, how they would gain access to God's presence is through his most magnificent act of faithful love, the sending of the Lord Jesus, the one whose hands and heart are totally pure, the one in whom all the blessings of the Lord are found, and the one in whose face we seek God.

And that begins to make sense of this complex and chaotic world, of the pains and muddles of daily life. We need to encourage one another not to look inwards to ourselves or downwards to the earth in its chaos, but to look up to the Lord in his holy place, to the Lord Jesus risen and ascended, reigning on the throne.

And nothing more effectively grounds us and helps us to make sense of a confused world than putting the ultimate thing in the right place. Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord and stand in his holy place, anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus, the one who has made a way into the presence of the Lord, the one who is God with us, the one who purifies us.

And if that's the case, then this is something worth telling each other. It's a joy to be able to say the words of this psalm to one another and thoughts that we should remind one another of in the midst of distress and battles that actually the way has been made known and we can come into the presence of the Lord for real.

[17:07] And we don't need to worry about that. Now, it is fairly evident to me, unless I've missed something huge in the time since this sermon began, that the new creation hasn't come yet.

We aren't fully and exclusively in the presence of God's holy place. There's a distinct presence of ongoing pain in the world. The lack of world peace is quite a big giveaway that we're not yet in the presence of the Lord.

We're all so aware in day-to-day life that things haven't reached a satisfactory conclusion yet. And that's kind of true of this psalm. There's still more to go.

Where is this going to end up? And so the psalm culminates in these last four verses, kind of answering the question, where is all this going? And since we've had something about creation and something about salvation, all that awaits is glory.

And that last question, the last question that's asked by this psalm might seem kind of surprising, because the question asked in verse 8 and verse 10 is, who is this king of glory?

[18:10] And again, knee-jerk reaction, we wanted to say, obviously it's God, come on, get on with the psalm. But again, just slow down. Why do we need that question and the answer that comes with it?

Remember this psalm that's written by David, who is the king in the end. The king himself says, there is a king above him who is far more glorious than any earthly splendor David might attain.

The last section of the psalm then is about opening up the gates and welcoming in the king, fresh from victory. The seven and eight are repeated almost verbatim in verses eight and nine.

Notice that when we read that out, it's just the same thing again, slight edits. It's the Bible's way of telling us, this is hugely important. You need to sing it, get it into your soul, and then sing it immediately again to get it right in there.

So who is this king of glory? He is the God of victory. So I want you just to imagine together. Imagine you're in a huge city, a great city, with a square at the front of the city and front of the city gates and a crowd so big it can't be counted and an atmosphere that is absolutely electric. [19 : 24] And then a trumpet sounds and the crowd silences and a herald shouts, lift out the gates, the king is victorious. And the king rides into cheers of thousands and joyful praise.

And now whether you resonate with that on a kind of Lord of the Rings level or maybe like a royal family level or even like a football supporter level, you can all get that kind of victory feeling, that glorious, happy, it is good, he has won, it is a great day. And so here in the psalm, we already know that God owns the world. So we're not inviting God into something that he doesn't already own. No, we're calling God in as a kind of welcome, glorious king because you have been victorious, because you have won the battle against evil and against sin and brought us salvation.

And so in seven and nine, the gates are open to welcome in and celebrate the king. In verses eight and 10, we're told that he is glorious because he is mighty in battle, strong and powerful, the glorious God of victorious armies, truly in power and therefore absolutely worthy of praise. He is the one who by his decisive battle wins victory over evil and will reign forever. Now David knew this looking into the future, knowing it was to come because the Lord had already showed him in Israel's history his victory in the exodus and many victories in David's time as king.

[20 : 58] He was absolutely assured that one day the biggest victory would be won. And so in the same way, we look back to those victories but also to the Lord Jesus, victorious over sin and the cross, over death through the resurrection and ascended to heaven and reigning now.

Now we long to be in the eternity that he has for us at his side, in a place free from pain and death and suffering and our assurance is that as God has kept his promises in the past, so he will keep them in the future.

That is as sure as the earth is the Lord's. And so naturally, we sing these things to one another and say them to one another, not just in the psalm, but in all of our worship. All those who believe in Jesus will one day stand in that crowd welcoming him in from his great victory over sin and death, over misery and evil, to rule as king of glory forever.

So brothers and sisters, don't stop telling each other that. I need to hear that every day because I forget it in the face of life's complexities, in the face of the sufferings that we all go through. It is so easy to forget and we need to be told every single day that he is good, that this world is his, that he has made a way and he will reign victoriously.

[22 : 20] And so just take that knowledge and try and apply it to that thought that we had at the start in that silence. Whenever it's going through your mind that is distressing you, just preach the words of this psalm into your own soul.

In the face of what you're suffering, this world is the Lord's and everything in it. That through Jesus, he has made a way for us to be in his glorious presence and he will one day be victorious over all evil, death and suffering.

Let those things sink in and then spend as much time as you can when you meet people just telling them that good news. Because we all need to hear it and we need reminded of it every day because whilst the knowledge of that truth stays in my head, the feeling of that truth falls out of my heart daily.

And so to finish our time in this psalm then, I'm just going to read us a passage from Revelation 7. Right at the end of the Bible where we're finally given that victorious picture of Jesus' final victory. So if you want to follow along, it's Revelation 7 starting at verse 9. And it helps us just to picture this victory and how the people of the Lord respond on that day. So I'm going to read this as a kind of prayer to finish this sermon.

[23 : 33] So Revelation 7 starting at verse 9. After this, I looked and before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And they fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying, Amen. Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.

Amen. For a God who is victorious over death and that you sent your Son that we might also be with you in that victory.

In your holy name, Lord. Amen. Encouraging one another as we go out this week that our God is victorious and strong in battle. So, sing together again in call and response.

[24 : 45] Lift up your heads, you gates. Be lifted up, you ancient doors. The King of glory will be in our hands. Who is this King of glory? The Lord is strong and mighty.

The Lord is mighty and mighty. Lift up your heads, you gates. Lift them up, you ancient doors. The King of glory will be in our hands. Who is he, this King of glory?

The Lord is mighty, he is the King of glory. Let's remember that. Let's saces with o Singlets. With the King of glory, you ■■ Ilega o mog■ to the hearth the King of glory.

So fucking that I classify the Lord of as advance.