**Creator and glorious King** 4/6/23

Read: 2Samuel 6, Psalm 24

Text: Psalm 24

Psalms: 19:1-8a, 15, 89:5-14, 134a

Many years ago I stood in a field in India with a Hindu man. He told me that this was Hindu land, a place where only Hindu gods should be worshipped. That man was not the current Prime Minister of India, but his thinking was the same. I had to remind him that this land belonged to the God who created it, the true and living God of the Bible. Every day we hear news readers say they are on ‘Gadigal land’. Some indigenous people speak of their close connection to the land in much the same way as that Hindu man. Indeed, most people love, and often worship, the small (or big) piece of land on which they live. We all need to be reminded that the earth is the Lord’s because he made it. We need to remember that our eternal home is not on or in a piece of land here on earth. We are sojourners or pilgrims, whose eternal home is in heaven.

This psalm, like many others, reminds us that the Lord, Yahweh, made this world, including the land we walk on, the seas and everything that exists. It is the Lord, not his creation, we are to worship. God is good and he made everything good. God is holy and cannot look upon sin. David then explains how we are to worship the Lord. The Lord has declared how we are to worship him.

This psalm was sung as the people of God gathered to worship him. It may have been composed when David had the Ark of the Covenant brought up to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom. This was an occasion of great celebration, with thousands singing praises to the Lord (2Sam 6). This ark symbolised the presence of the Lord among his people. It was placed in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle or temple. All the people came up to the temple to worship the Lord. This psalm falls into three sections which we will call: ‘God made and rules the world’, ‘God and worship’, and ‘Glorious King enters the city’.

**1. God made and rules the world**

For the last one hundred and fifty years evolutionists have tried to bury the truth of Genesis 1 and 2; some Christians have assisted them by calling these first two chapters of the Bible ‘mythology’. But it is not only these two chapters that declare God as the creator; this psalm and others declare the earth to be the Lord’s because he made it (Ps 89:11). In the NT we read the same truth: ‘For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him’ (Col 1:16).

A feature of sin is ignorance, and it is with ignorance, and yes, great imagination, that people make their own gods to worship. These gods are associated with created things because this is all sinful man in his spiritual blindness can see. The Canaanites had their Baal gods, just like the Hindus, Buddhists, and evolutionists of today. But David knew, as we know, that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, created the earth and everything in it in the space of six 24hr days. He did this in the beginning; the true and living God is not part of the creation and objects to being represented by things he created.

The ark symbolised the presence of God because it contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. God is known by his words. Jesus of course, is the living word, the ‘Word became flesh’ (John 1:14). The stone tablets are lost, and Jesus has returned to heaven. What we have today in the Bible, thankfully translated into our language, as the word of God. You will notice I have not referred to Islam among the other religions. This is because Mohammed saw Jews and Christians as ‘People of the book’. So he wrote his own book and similarly rejected all images.

‘The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness’ (24:1). The ‘earth’ includes the stars; it is the entire universe (Ps 19). Its ‘fullness’ includes every living thing. ‘Fullness’ conveys a picture of fertility, beauty, and productivity. We use the word ‘ecosystem’, a somewhat more bland term describing the co-existence of plants and animals on the earth. The ‘world’ refers to the living creatures of the earth, including mankind who brought sin into the world. In verse 2 David draws upon imagery from Genesis 1:9-10 to describe how the Lord founded the earth ‘upon the seas’ or ‘upon the waters’ or literally, ‘upon the rivers’. David did not think Genesis 1 was mythology, and nor did the apostle Paul (Col 1:16).

In Colossians 1 Paul goes on to speak of the church, of which Christ is the head. All creation is being called to worship the Lord, and he has established his church as the place here on earth where we must gather to worship the Lord. The Jews went up to Jerusalem, along with some Gentiles who joined them. Now there is neither Jew nor Gentile in the church of which Christ is the head. To the church will come the elect from all nations, all tribes, and all tongues? There will be no land of Hindus or evolutionists, or any other religion, because ‘the earth is the Lord’s… the world and all who dwell in it’. People from all nations will be brought into the church, and ultimately to the gates of the holy city of the Lord (Rev 21:24). O, that we would understand what the church, with Christ as its head, means to the Lord!

Before moving on to the next part of this psalm, we note how the apostle Paul quotes from it in the context of eating meat sold in the meat market at Corinth (1Cor 10:26,28). Since the Lord created everything that exists, we can eat whatever we like, with thanksgiving, and with the provision of not harming another person’s conscience, or our own bodies. In the beginning God made the earth and its fullness, and put man in charge, not for the purpose of exploitation or worship but for man’s enjoyment and God’s glory.

**2. God and worship**

Worship must not be undertaken in ignorance, or with our imagination. Worship must be based upon a knowledge of God, and in fact, upon what God himself has declared in his word. If we do not believe that God created everything in the space of six days we fail the first step in worship. David goes on to ask, ‘Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?’, or in the parallel line, ‘Who may stand in His holy place?’ (24:3). A similar question is asked at the beginning of Psalm 15, and a similar but more detailed answer is given.

Here in Psalm 24 David points to four characteristics demanded of those who seek the Lord. Firstly, ‘clean hands’. We must have ‘no blood on our hands’ so to speak; we must not be guilty of murder, or bullying, or abuse or hating a brother, as Jesus indicates in his sermon on the mount. ‘Clean hands’ refers to ‘outward’ sins that must be repented of before entering the Lord’s house to worship him. Paul desires people everywhere ‘lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting’ (1Tim 2:8).

Secondly, ‘a pure heart’. Our worship must be from the heart, as well as from ‘clean hands’. Ritualism will not do because God looks on the heart; is this a challenge for you? It is a challenge for us all! God knows all our thoughts and the desires of our heart. Again, remember the sermon the mount: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God’, and then where Jesus calls lust adultery. Jesus later describes many sins as proceeding from the heart (Mat 15:19). We cannot worship God when either our hands or our hearts are dirty, when we are polluted inside or out by sin and unrighteousness.

The third and fourth requirements for worship are in the negative, as in not worshipping any idol, and not speaking or swearing what is false or deceitful (24:4). ‘Lifting up your soul’ is the same as worship. David knew the commandments, the first of which refers to other gods, and the second to graven images. Idols of wood or stone, or any other created thing, including human beings, are vain things, utterly unworthy of our worship. Only the Lord is worthy of our worship, and he demands exclusive worship.

The politicians demand we be ‘inclusive’, but the Lord demands exclusive worship, worship of Him alone. God is holy or separate, and we must be the same, especially when it comes to worship (2Cor 6:17). Idols are not only vain, they are false gods and lies. People who worship idols are worshipping Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). The sinful heart is a proud heart, which protects itself with lies and deception.

Does anyone meet these demands of those who would worship the Lord- apart from Jesus that is! No, not without the grace of God, which is what this psalm now explains; ‘Righteousness from the God of his salvation’ (24:5). ‘What is impossible for sinful man to do is ultimately received as a gift from God’ (Harman). The Lord does not lessen his demands because of our sin; he graciously gives us righteousness, the righteousness of his own Son, Jesus Christ, to those who seek him and desire to worship him.

While we know Jesus as our Saviour, David speaks of God as his Saviour. He knew about grace, and justification by grace alone through faith alone, just as we do. David knew from the Bible that God is gracious and forgives sin, and imputes righteousness to those who seek his face. He was not the first, and certainly not the last, to believe in God’s grace. He refers to Jacob his forefather who refused to let go of the Lord until he blessed him (Gen 39:29); such was his desire for the blessing of the Lord.

**3. Glorious and victorious King enters in**

It is the closing verses that point to the occasion being that of David bringing the ark up to Jerusalem. He had taken this city from the Jebusites and built his place on Mt Zion. He wanted to build a house for the Lord also. We might picture David or the Levites shouting for the huge gates of the city to be opened so the ark could be carried in (24:7). Their shout is answered with a question, ‘Who is the King of glory?’ and the declaration, ‘The Lord, strong and mighty’ (24:8). They were not exactly returning victorious from battle, but they had done just that many times previously. David acknowledged God’s help in all his victories. The Lord was seen as a ‘warrior God’, giving victory to David and the army of Israel in every God-ordained battle against the enemies of God and Israel.

The shout, ‘Lift up your heads, O you gates’ is heard again in verse 9, and again the King of glory is pictured as entering in; this time the King of glory is called the ‘Lord of hosts’ (24:10). ‘Hosts’ means armies; the Lord is seen as leader of Israel’s army, and more than this, as over and above all the armies on earth and in heaven. ‘Host’ covers earth and heaven. In Colossians 1:16 we read of thrones, dominions, principalities and powers. God’s sovereignty and power extends to all the nations, their leaders and their armies, to Satan and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).

We do not go up to the temple in Jerusalem today but we still sing this royal psalm. We do so because the same Lord is now risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. The psalm itself refers to ‘everlasting doors’ (24:7), and in Hebrews we read of the gates of heaven being opened for Jesus. Jesus conquered death and Satan, and now rules from his throne in heaven over all the nations of the world. We are privileged to ‘ascend the hill of the Lord’ as it were, and worship the Lord, just as David did, but like David we must remember that God is holy so we must be made holy, as in cleansed of our sin, when we seek his face on worship. This holiness or righteousness is given to us when we confess our sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.