

Sermon on Psalm 24 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Psalm 24:1-10

God conspiring to spread his glory is compassionate to those who seek him and that's enough to keep us as we wait for him to come again.

Last week was nice... I had a week off from preaching. A bit of a break to spend time with the family. And as I was back in the office this week, I couldn't help but relate to Sisyphus.

“In Greek mythology, Sisyphus or Sisypheos (/ˈsɪsɪfəs/; Ancient Greek: Σίσυφος Sísyphos) was the founder and king of Ephyra (now known as Corinth). He was a devious tyrant who killed visitors to show off his power. This violation of the sacred hospitality tradition greatly angered the gods. They punished him for trickery of others, including his cheating death twice. The gods forced him to roll an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down every time it neared the top, repeating this action for eternity. Through the classical influence on modern culture, tasks that are both laborious and futile are therefore described as Sisyphean (/sɪsɪˈfiːən/).”

Now, I don't relate to being a devious tyrant... but to the sense of rolling the boulder up the hill day after day.

Routine, regular life can feel like this. Even when we get a break, hit the beach, we still have to go back to the boulder.

Not just work life. Relationships. War against sin in our lives. Then we look up beyond ourselves and it seems futile. Human struggle. War. Hunger. All the things that feel too big to handle.

During Advent, if we are doing it right, we have permission to be honest about these things, the drudgery of rolling our boulder up the hill everyday.

If the church is doing Advent right, then we gather recognizing the darkness and look each other in the eyes and say, ‘actually the hilltop has come down to us! Our lifting now is light in comparison to the glory to come. Look up!’

Psalm 24 helps us to that.

Dave went out of order... he was supposed to preach from Psalm 2, the introduction of the King we meet in Psalm 24. But he showed us something vital as we wait for the final redemption of Jesus' return, God knows our grief - self-inflicted and otherwise - and he rescues us.

Psalm 22:24 "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him."
(ESV)

Our rescuer is the One who... "He restores my soul. "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." **Psalm 23:3-4** (ESV)

Now, he is the King we have been waiting for.

Following this flow, Psalm 24 tells us of God's ongoing work, our place before him, and how we wait for his promised return.

God is Conspiring

When we think of conspiracy, it is usually not in a good light. But the God who is over all things, who created and owns it all, is still up to something. Something behind the scenes, underneath it all. Building, bringing something to bear, extravagantly extending his grace to those he created.

David, as psalmist, reminds us in this song that God is not aloof, or uninvolved, but engaged as Creator and sustainer.

We rejoice in this, as we see his power in creation.

Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein," (ESV)

It's all his.

“God owns the world and everything in it. He created the continents and the seas; he invented plate tectonics. Personally, you and I belong to God. This is where we start in order to understand how to live in God’s world.”

We need this. Opposing worldviews say it’s all chaos and random. Scripture tells us it is all created, ordered, and his purpose is ever unfolding.

Spoiler! “The King of Glory” David looks forward to is God himself. Affirming the divinity of Jesus ahead of his first arrival.

Hebrews 1:3 “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (ESV)

Colossians 1:15–20 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (ESV)

More than just maintenance, conspiracy to proclaim his glory for our good. That reconciliation has come and is unleashed by the work of the cross.

2 Corinthians 4:6 “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

When the shadows of Advent grow long and cold, take heart, God is at work conspiring to build his kingdom, to fill the earth with his glory.

The One who founded the earth upon the seas, is at work even when we wonder where it all is headed, when the boulder seems to be at the base of the hill every morning.

Not only is He conspiring...

God is Compassionate

I was going to say God is Clement (merciful) but we wouldn't get that. Compassion though, we understand.

This foundation of the Lord as owner and creator leads us to ask, and David as well, how do we relate to Him?

Psalm 24:3-4 “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? [4] 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.” (ESV)

This psalm is not a psalm of ascent. Some say it could have been sung bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. We just don't know the occasion. Leads me to think David isn't writing of worshipers coming into the Tabernacle - washing their hands and going into worship... Bigger than that.

He is asking and answering the question that honestly drives most of our lives whether we realize it or not.

How do we get close to this Creator?

Answer comes back, be innocent, don't trust in idols (things we look to for things only God can do), don't swear to false gods. And have a pure heart.

“How could a human maintain innocent hands? Only by having a pure heart, which is the second descriptor in 24:4 of the one who can enter Yahweh's presence. Whereas the statement about innocent hands speaks to the man's actions, the description of the heart speaks to his thoughts, motives, emotions, and inclinations, all of which are pure. This remarkable man who has the right to ascend Yahweh's mountain and stand in his holy place will be “innocent of hands and pure of heart” (24:4).” James Hamilton

I have been in settings where this has been read as proof that you had better live perfectly! I remember looking around the room thinking “we are deceiving ourselves!”

Who can cast the first stone? How can we live up to this innocence necessary? Purity beyond us. We are left at the bottom of the hill.

“When we stack up our lives against these requirements, we have a problem! Who would dare to say that they don’t have the slightest stain of sin on their hands—that their thoughts are always pure, that they have never trusted a lie to protect them, and that they always tell the truth? These requirements, if we take them seriously, bring us to the end of ourselves and show us our sin.”

So this is not a call to morality (not a bad thing) but recognition that the perfection required is beyond us. Something deeper is happening here.

It’s the King of Glory who has clean hands and a pure heart. It is the Messianic King who carries righteousness.

Psalm 24:5 “He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (ESV)

Receives vindication from God his savior... that he is the King the promised One.

A friend just last week climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro with his daughters. Reflecting on it, I had the thought that it would have been easier if the summit came down to you.

That is exactly what happens for us in Jesus. That is exactly what anchors us through the waters of Advent. That another has given us standing in the presence of the Lord.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (ESV)

2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (ESV)

Christians celebrate God’s “tabernacling” among human beings, not only in the ancient era of the ark of the covenant but also in the Word, who “became flesh and dwelt [or “tabernacled”] among us” (John 1:14). His disciples tell us that they

“have seen his glory,” and we are being built into a new “dwelling place for God [in] the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:5). We say that the God who made and owns the world became man in Jesus and intends for all manner of people to join in the privilege of worshiping him truly, throughout his world.”

Psalm 24:6 “Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah” (ESV)

Jesus is the One that can ascend the hill of the Lord. And those that believe in him, that belong to him, are united with him, are given his righteousness so that we too can dwell in the presence of God. He makes us innocent...

Jude 24 “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,” (ESV)

“Although Jesus Christ was pure, he became sin for us as he carried our sin on the cross. He died and rose again so that our stained, guilty hands could be washed clean and our impure hearts could be purified. How much does our Creator love us? Christ came to wash us and purify us from the guilt that stains us and keeps us from coming before a God who is like a consuming fire.” James Johnston

[Your Creator cares for you, even if you have given yourself to some of the worst things this world has to offer. He knows you are not fit for Heaven now; so his Son made the way for you. Won't you come to him today? Let him change you.

If you know Jesus, then you will be a part of that crowd—God's Word says so—and Christ himself, your King, will lead you in victory, along with all those who have gone before us in the Lord.]

And when Christ purifies us, he also makes us into what we should be. He transforms us by his Holy Spirit into people who keep God's requirements ourselves, men and women who are self-controlled and godly, eager to do good.

Rooted in this compassionate first arrival then, we are eager for his second.

God is Coming Soon

Like Jerusalem welcoming her King, we keep our eyes up, expectant, active, ready for the King of glory.

Psalm 24:7–10 “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. [8] Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! [9] Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. [10] Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah” (ESV)

“One day the King of glory, Yahweh of hosts, the divine warrior, will come at last. The gates will hear the command to lift up their heads. The ancient doors will open. And the good shepherd will see all his sheep safely to pasture.” Hamilton

The King is God. The messianic King is the Lord, strong and mighty, the lord of hosts.

Repeated for emphasis... But also, I think, because he comes twice.

Strong and mighty in battle, defeating Satan and death on the cross and through his resurrection. And still to come as almighty over all things to set everything right for eternity.

“So this second shout seems to be hinting that our King will ride up to the gates of Zion, the heavenly city, a second time with his hosts, a crowd of his saints following him, victorious in battle.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words. (ESV)

In between we wait, in community, ready to welcome our King.

“People who wait have received a promise that allows them to wait. They have received something that is at work in them, like a seed that has started to grow. This is very important. We can only really wait if what we are waiting for has

already begun for us. So waiting is never a movement from nothing to something. It is always a movement from something to something more.” Henri Nouwen

The seed of salvation, our justification in Jesus. Made right before God. The seed of his kingdom taking root in our hearts and lives. Being used to bring renewal wherever he has placed us.

“Those who are waiting are waiting very actively. They know that what they are waiting for is growing from the ground on which they are standing. That’s the secret. The secret of waiting is the faith that the seed has been planted, that something has begun. Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and what you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that this is *the* moment.” Henri Nouwen

Eager for his promised return, we keep our eyes lifted and lift each other to see his coming. We remind each other and tell others!

Not unlike the first arrival. Where Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, both recipients of promise, pregnant with expectation of what is to come.

Luke 1:44–46 “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” [46] And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,” (ESV)

This visit of Elizabeth and Mary is one of the Bible’s most beautiful expressions of what it means to form community, to be together, gathered around a promise, affirming that something is really happening.

This is our active waiting.

That is what prayer is all about. It is coming together around the promise. That is what celebration is all about. It is lifting up what is already here. This is what the table is about. It is saying “thank you for the seed that has been planted. It is saying, “We are waiting for the Lord, who has already come.”

“The whole meaning of the Christian community lies in offering a space in which we wait for that which we have already seen. Christian community is the place where we keep the flame alive among us and take it seriously, so that it can grow and become stronger in us. In this way we can live with courage, trusting that there is a spiritual power in us that allows us to live in this world without being seduced constantly by despair, lostness, and darkness. That is how we dare to say that God is a God of love even when we see hatred all around us. That is why we can claim that God is a God of life even when we see death and destruction and agony all around us. We say it together. We affirm it in one another. Waiting together, nurturing what has already begun, expecting its fulfillment.” Henri Nouwen

God conspiring to spread his glory is compassionate to those who seek him and that’s enough to keep us as we wait for him to come again.

Take heart. Your life is not Sisyphean. All of this is going somewhere.

He is building His kingdom, giving wave upon wave of grace to those who seek him. The King of glory is coming soon.

May we wait with anticipation that doors would be opened to him, and that we would rest in his grace and glory.