

Lift Up Your Heads (and See) ... Open Your Gates (Hearts)

(Of David. A psalm) The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. (Selah) Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O 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. (Selah)

What prayer do you use at mealtime? We use the “Come Lord Jesus,” prayer. I have used that prayer since I can remember. I have to admit that I don’t always pray it. Sure I say it, but I don’t always mean it. I could have my lunch on the table and I take a bite and stop, “Oh, I forgot to pray,” and I quietly say the prayer as if I would be struck by lightning or my food turned to ash by an angry God if I didn’t. Is that the kind of prayer God wants? I catch myself looking around the table, mouthing the words, but checking to see if each kid is praying, and I catch one looking out the window. Who is more guilty, him for looking out the window or me for looking at him? Luther said the Lord’s Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth because we pray it carelessly. I think the dinner prayer comes in a close second.

But our Psalm today gives us some really good advice. It simply says, “Pay attention.” ***“Lift up your heads, O 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.”*** And what will I find if I listen? Even that simple dinner prayer is full of good things. “Come, Lord Jesus.” We are actually inviting Jesus to be our guest at dinner. “Let these gifts to us be blessed.” I need to hear that. It means that all the food on the table, in fact all that I have—wife, children, church, home, breath—are actually gifts from God. Good reminder. “O give thanks to the Lord.” Again, I need that reminder to thank God because I usually forget to. “For he is good. His love endures forever.” Again, I need to be reminded the Lord loves me and his love will endure anything I do. And how long will it endure? Forever.

Think about it, 30 words in those two dinner prayers say so much. Today is Palm Sunday and if there is one thing that really catches our attention, it is the crowds throwing coats and palm branches on the road and praising Jesus. And yet, do we feel that way every time we come to church? Psalm 24 is going to be like mom. It gives us a good elbow in the side so we lift up our heads to actually see what is going on, and then open our hearts so the King of glory comes in.

I. Lift up your heads so you may actually see.

What would you prefer, to go to a basketball game or go to the opera? I like all kinds of music, classical, jazz, even some of my daughter’s music, but I am not an opera fan. First, it is all sung in Italian and I don’t speak Italian. Second, they are long. Third, there is a high-brow atmosphere. If you whisper anything some lady turns around and says, “Shhhh!” But a friend took me to an opera one time. I joked the whole way there how he has to keep me awake. He did, but not by elbowing me. He took the program and showed me the English translation of the words. He explained to me all the symbolism and costumes. He explained the plot, the characters, everything. It was still Italian, still long, still high brow, They didn’t put on basketball uniforms to get my attention or change the music one note, but I was captivated every minute because I paid attention.

We hear that worship is boring. But is the problem with worship, or is it with us? Take the sun, for example. It gives us day and night. It warms us so we can survive. It makes plants grow. It is so complex, so awesome, so powerful. Without it we would die. But do we marvel at it every day, or do we actually ignore it or even get mad at it as it shines in our eyes? Now, go ahead, ask the sun to become more interesting. Ask it to change colors or change its shape. The sun would simply laugh at us. “I am more brilliant than you can imagine the way I am.” The problem is not with the sun. It is with us.

When we say that church and worship is boring, we are saying that God who is bigger than the universe, infinitely more powerful and more complex and awesome than we can ever imagine, is boring and should change. But the last thing we need is for God to change. The change needs to come to us. And it begins by lifting up our heads out of our measly little lives and seeing. I really appreciate the dinner prayer when I concentrate on the words. The opera, which before bored me, excited me because I actually paid attention to it. When we look up, what do we see, what do we see?

“The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” If I asked you, “Do you believe in creation,” you will instantly say yes. But if I asked you if you marveled at God’s creation this morning, or contemplated how many blessings he gives us in creation, you will say, “Well, no. It took I had to just get the kids dressed and to church let alone to pay attention to the sunrise.” I need this psalm to elbow me. I need worship, the Bible readings, sermon, hymns to actually get my attention.

Then I see an awesome God. He created everything. He laid its foundations, separated land from water, created life forms, vegetation, sun, moon stars, atmosphere, us. He knitted us together in the wombs of our mothers. He turns bad things into good for us. He commands his angels to guard us. God all by himself is so awesome we could study him an entire lifetime and

only scratch the surface.

II. Open your gates so the King of glory may come in.

And he also saves us. ***“Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.”*** Good question, David. There are four things required to stand in the Lord’s presence: clean, sin-free hands; a clean, sin-free heart; one who doesn’t love idols or worthless things; finally, one who doesn’t swear by what is false. Well, who here meets those criteria? What have your hands done? What shows did they tune to on television or the internet? How about the heart? Yes, you know that hatred is wrong, and thanks for keeping from coming out of your mouth in bad words or from your hands that would have punched me, but it corrupts the heart. In fact, it was your corrupt heart that created hatred. What excites more, the NCAA brackets or singing the opening hymn? Finally, by what do you say is the key to everything? A good retirement plan or God’s promise to take care of us?

We fail all four requirements. And the Lord knows that. So, like mom, he tells us to first wash our hands before sitting down to supper. ***“He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.”*** The Lord vindicates us; he makes things right between us and hm. There was one person who could stand before God, his Son. Jesus is the only one who could say to the Father, ***“I have brought you glory on earth.”*** He prayed as one should pray, with complete trust, continuously. He loved others more than himself always. The Father was the only focus of his life. His hands were not involved in a single sin, his heart pure. Even his death brought him glory, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

When my daughter returned to college, I handed her my Kwik Trip card and told her to fill up her car and drop the card off at church. It was free gas because it was my card and I get the bill. Forgiveness and heaven are free because Jesus paid for it. It is a card with Jesus’ name that lets us into heaven. I don’t know about you, but I need to open worship with the confession of sins. It is the washing of our hands before dinner to remove all the dirt and grime and bacteria of our lives. We wash them in the blood of Christ. And how clean will they become? As clean as a perfect, holy Jesus Christ. It is like the dinner prayer where we pray, “Come Lord Jesus,”

You know that is why worship is important, even comforting. Oh we could change the instruments we use, the decorations in church, we could sell this building and worship in our homes. But those are not the things that make it interesting. It is what the Lord tells us every time. He tells me he still loves me. He is like that sweet, dedicated wife and mother who cooks three meals a day for us, and she will do the same tomorrow and everyday even if we don’t say thank you, even if we complain about the beans, even if we don’t help with the dishes or brag how grandma made such a wonderful roast beef last Sunday and don’t say a word about her roast beef. If she didn’t love her family, she would go on strike, yell at them, hit them on the head with a pan. But in love and faithfulness she continues to cook another meal. “His love endures forever.” I need to hear that.

Palm Sunday must have been exciting. But there was one thing that was wrong Palm Sunday. Most of the people got excited over the scene and not why Jesus was riding that donkey into Jerusalem. They sang the right words, but they didn’t pay attention to those words. How do I know that? Palm Sunday was short lived. They didn’t repeat it. In fact many of those voices sang a different tune five days later, “Crucify him.” Yes, our worship would be boring as dust if we don’t lift up our heads to see. I could arm the ushers with ten foot poles and train them to tap anyone on the shoulder who isn’t paying attention, but that would be no good. They would be too busy to pay attention themselves, and it is the wrong kind of motivation. Instead, let Psalm 24 help you. Lift up your heads and actually see what is going on here, and watch the King of glory march through your open hearts. Amen.