

Sermon Draft

Text: Psalm 24

Sermon: “Awesome Creator”

Our text this morning, Psalm 24 begins with a picturesque affirmation of God as Creator: *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers”* (vs 1–2). God is the Creator of everything; we are his creation. When we think of God as Creator, two words come to mind: powerful and wise.

To see how powerful God is, ask how many stars there are in the observable universe. When you Google that question, you find that it is estimated at a billion trillion. That’s a one with twenty-one zeroes after it. Astronomers figure this by multiplying the billions of stars in an average galaxy by the billions of galaxies in the universe that can be seen. That’s beyond our imagination! God is incredibly majestic and powerful to create all of the universe.

But to bring it back to a more manageable size, consider how wise God is. Look at your hand. What can you do with your hand? Pick something up. Open and shut a door. On a roller coaster, you can hold on tight. You can lead a dog. You can hold someone else's hand to show love and care. You can wear a ring to symbolize love. A hand has blood vessels, cartilage, bones, and nerves to make it work. Look at your hand, and you get a picture of the wisdom needed to create something so intricately wonderful.

Then come the questions: ***“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?”*** (v 3). Who gets to be in the presence of this powerful, wise, almighty Creator God? Who can stand before him? Who can enter his heavenly home?

The next verse says: ***“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”*** (v 4). Now we're in trouble. Who has clean hands? Or a pure heart? Or doesn't use words that are false or wrong or hurtful? None of us.

The psalmist is talking about hands that are doing what is right and true in God's eyes. But our hands can hold on to our money way too tightly when somebody needs our generosity. Or our hands can be on a mouse of a computer and click on a site that our eyes and minds should never see. Or our hands can be kept to ourselves when we should have been lending a helping hand. Or our hands can push someone away who needs a hug or some care. Or our hands can make a fist or a slap or a pointing finger that can hurt when we are way too angry. No, we do not have clean hands.

As for our hearts, they are not pure. Our hearts deal with the desires and motivations in life. I can be walking around the neighborhood, and it happens to be trash day. Every so often someone will put out a box that doesn't fit in the garbage can, like one for an eighty-inch television. And what happens? I see the box and my heart becomes jealous. I don't need a television that large. Our smaller one is fine.

But still the desire grabs my heart. Or we pick up the Sunday newspaper and see all the color ads or watch a commercial, and the same thing happens. Envy, jealousy, a desire for something we don't need arises in our hearts. Or perhaps we have a dark secret in our heart, one that we want no one ever to find out. But God can see it. Or perhaps our heart holds a grudge and won't let it go. Our hearts are not always pure.

As for our words, it's not just profanity or telling a lie. It's when we use words that hurt. A relationship is harmed when words like these come out in the midst of a fight: "Get away!" "I don't love you anymore!" The words do damage.

Clean hands? Pure hearts? Good words? Not a chance. Who can enter into this Creator God's holy place? Well, if it depends on clean hands, pure hearts, and words that aren't deceitful, not us. Not anyone. And we're in real trouble.

Here's where we need to go to the last four verses of this psalm, because when we go to the end of the psalm, everything turns around. We hear the words ***“Lift up your heads, O gates.”*** Now that could refer to gates being lifted up, but normally in the Bible lifting up is about lifting up our spirits. Lifting up in hope. Lifting up in joy. Lifting up in anticipation. ***“Lift up your heads, O gates . . . that the King of glory may come in.”*** ***The hope, joy, anticipation is that the Lord of glory will come in: “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O 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 gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!”*** (vs 7–10). Hope and joy erupt when the King of glory will enter into that heavenly home, that glorious place of God's almighty presence.

But that raises the question: “When did he leave?” When did the Lord of glory leave that glorious home? The answer is Christmas. From heaven above to earth below came Jesus. He left heaven’s glory to become one of us. We use that word Immanuel, God with us.

Then, when Jesus grows up and he is about thirty years old, he is baptized in the Jordan River. The heavens open up and the Father says, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” Near the end of his ministry, when he is transfigured on a mountain, the same thing happens. The Father is well pleased with his beloved Son. He is well pleased because Jesus has clean hands, a pure heart, and wonderful words.

Jesus, with his hands, reaches out and heals those who are sick. With his heart, he welcomes those who have been pushed aside or left out or damaged. With his words, he calls to himself those who have done what is wrong with their hands, hearts, and words. He calls us to seek after God through him.

But soon comes a dark day. Jesus hanging on a cross, in the darkness, has swirling around him whatever our unclean hands have done; whatever impure desires, thoughts, and motivations that have come out of our hearts; whatever hurtful words that have spewed from our mouths. Everything that would ever keep us from entering God's almighty presence is there, on Jesus. And God shuts his heavenly gates on him as Jesus cries out, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** We call it Good Friday, for on that cross, Jesus gives us forgiveness along with his righteousness and salvation.

Then, on Easter morning, the doors open up again. A stone is rolled away. Jesus is alive. Forty days later, the heavens open again. This time Jesus is ascending into heaven. The disciples are looking up as Jesus rises from their sight. What's happening here? Jesus is entering into his holy place. Lift up your heads, and the disciples are looking up with hope and joy and anticipation. The Lord of glory is entering his heavenly home once again.

And why? Jesus entered the Gates of Heaven to give us righteousness and salvation so that we, too, will one day enter his holy gates.

See, now we can go back to verses 5–6: ***“He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.”*** When we seek after Jesus, trust in what he has done for us, and hold on to him in faith, then righteousness, blessing, and salvation come to us. God’s gracious, glorious gift is that his heavenly home is now open to us because of Jesus

God is the awesome Creator with wisdom and power, and the only way we are going to stand in his holy place is through Jesus becoming one of us. He entered back into the holy place to give us salvation and righteousness. And more. He also gives us clean hands, pure hearts, and good words.

Amen