

## **Psalm 24: A Call to Worship-** Luke Bushman July 21<sup>st</sup> 2024

The scripture text that we are focusing on today, is Psalm 24. I try to see preaching as an opportunity, and I sometimes view sermon prep as a chance to share what I am passionate about and experienced in, and sometimes sermon prep is an exercise in learning about something I would not normally learn about. As a young boy with my first Bible, I was always drawn to the stories of the warriors and the miracles, so reading some emotive poems was not high on my list. After all, was I really expected to read 150 chapters of mushy poems and not a single narrative. As I have grown older I have always wanted to learn more about the Psalms, as they are packed full of artistic expression and emotional vulnerability. Those things interest me more nowadays than stories of warriors, despite the fact that I do still enjoy a good action movie from time to time.

When coming to the Psalms it becomes apparent quickly that these writings are not univocal, but are meant to touch on various parts of the human experience. Very similar to our Hymn books, some writings seem more appropriate for different times than others. I used James H Waltner's commentary to put this sermon together. Based on existing biblical scholarship, he believes that Psalm 24 served as a call to worship, perhaps used as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the temple. While we no longer have an ark brought in to begin our time together, we do have certain rhythms and postures that this Psalm touches on. Here is Waltner's outline of Psalm 24: **SLIDE CLICK**

It starts with a Hymn Celebrating God the Creator verses 1 and 2

It then moves into a An Entrance Liturgy, from verses 3-6

And finally the Psalm transforms into a Ceremony Welcoming the King of Glory, 24:7-10

We will go through each of these sections and try to experience the intent of the verses in our own context. After we will go through these sections again and consider what a life of worship looks like- what does it mean to apply this passage more than in a weekly call to worship. **SLIDE CLICK**

- Celebrating the Creator

“Here, the psalm proclaims God’s creation, inviting the worshipper to communion with such a powerful God” (Waltner, 133). It does not take much hard searching to see the beauty in God’s creation. I lived on Vancouver Island prior to moving to Saskatchewan, and having explored both places, even in Saskatchewan it is easy to see the beauty of creation. Two weeks ago, I was Bible Leading at Shekinah, which is a truly beautiful place to be. I took a picture coming down from Quill Hill on Tuesday night- I am not a photographer, so it wasn’t a fancy picture, but something about the smoky air in front of the pink sunset resonated with me. **SLIDE CLICK** I wonder which rivers and seas the Psalmist was imagining when they wrote the opening lines of Psalm 24. Perhaps those places resonated with them for a reason they could not quite understand. I thought in order to get into the headspace of the Psalmist I would write a little poem about this view that strangely touched me.

I climb above the trees

As if hoping to get closer to my maker

As I look out across the valley

My creator’s fingerprints are evident

I see beauty in a pinkish hue

Above puffs of green exploding from the ground

Not even the tint of smoke can damage the view

I breath in the muddled air and the haze surrounds me

As if my God is embracing me, and breathing life into me

This is the kind of practice that Psalmist participates in. Using what they see around them to remind them of God. The more we participate in this practice, the more we will acknowledge God in our daily lives, because the magnificence of creation is impossible to escape. In fact, we live off of the beauty of creation. It sustains us spiritually and emotionally, but it also gives us our physical nourishment.

After an acknowledgement of who is in dominion of this beautiful universe, the Psalm transitions into what Waltner calls “an entrance liturgy”. **SLIDE CLICK**

- An Entrance Liturgy

The Entrance Liturgy finds its basis in the Torah, and asks the question “Who can enter the temple?” (Waltner 133). If you have ever sat down to read Old Testament law on a sunny afternoon as we all do, you might be afraid to hear the answer to this question. Throughout the Old Testament people such as eunuchs, and crippled people are banned from entering the temple. Here however, the focus is on moral qualifications, not on ritual qualifications. “The answer [to the question of who can enter the temple], has to do with a person’s will. Not perfection of life but sincerity of purpose and integrity is required” (Waltner, 133). While people will always find bible verses to exclude others from the place of worship, there is a biblical basis for radical inclusion. The invitation to enter is more concerned with intent than with things that contribute to marginalization in the world.

The entrance liturgy is therefore a time in the service to examine one’s intent. To contemplate if their trust is in the Creator of the wonderful universe or not. To ponder why they feel compelled to worship today. Is it for appearances sake? To gain favour? To wrestle with a tough question? To be with others? To find encouragement? I think this is still part of our worship services today. Prayers of confession, prayers of invocation, and looking inward before communion are just a few of the ways we might embody the spirit of this entrance liturgy. **SLIDE CLICK**

- Ceremony Welcoming the King of Glory

The final section in this Psalm, Waltner labels as a “Ceremony Welcoming the King of Glory”. The main image in this portion is related to the gates and doors. Waltner says “In days of fortress cities, people often identified the gates with the king, and the king’s power. Here the language is metaphorical, personifying the gates. Their being lifted up represents openness, welcome and hope” (Waltner 134). I think OMC tries hard to live out openness, welcome and hope.

The main thing that stands out to me in these verses is the surprising paradox of the text. In the one sense, God is viewed as completely above humanity. God is the almighty creator, who is to be approached by those who “have clean hands and pure hearts”. This God is royal, and majestic- as shown in the kingly metaphor.

And yet, God opens the doors. God comes into the space of humans. The gates heads being lifted up, might refer to the beams above the door-meaning God is so big and mighty the gates might not be large enough for them (Waltner 134). God squeezes themselves into the small spaces where the humans are worshipping. What a powerful image.

In her book *Inspired* Rachel Held Evans makes a similar point about the nature of God. In her context she addresses the notion that God would not stoop down to human levels of communication in the scriptures. She says

“Dignified or not, believable or not, ours is a God perpetually on bended knee, doing everything it takes to convince stubborn and petulant children that they are seen and loved. It is no more beneath God to speak to us using poetry, proverb, letters, and legend than it is for a mother to read storybooks to her daughter at bedtime. This is who God is. This is what God does.”

That image of God stooping down to be with their creation, to meet their creation where creation is at is what this paradox is all about. The mighty God who created the world and is too all encompassing to fit through the doors of the temple, crouches down to enter into our place of worship.

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This Psalm is a wonderful call to worship. The opening lines set the tone for who God is- the creator and owner of the universe. Then there is a pause of anticipation. A nudge to examine oneself before the king arrives. Finally there is the joyous entrance of God into the space- the King of glory crouching down to come in our doors. Calls to worship are wonderful, which is why our services always begin with them. But what about the rest of the week? I have heard the phrase “A life of worship” thousands of times, but to this day, I struggle to understand what that means. So how can we apply this Call to Worship not just to our Sunday morning, but to the rest of our lives. Using Waltner’s three sections, I can hopefully make some suggestions for what this might look like, though I would love to hear other’s ideas for how to live out this call to worship.

First we have celebrating the creator. While during our services, or on a meditative nature walk we may simply ponder the big wide world God has made, there are also outward expressions of our belief that God is the

creator. None of these seem better than creation care. I am so thankful for the folks in this church and elsewhere who are willing to impart their knowledge about taking care of the earth. I think it so cool that so many people garden and reduce emissions. I have a lot to learn in this regard, and I feel blessed to be surrounded by diligent and patient teachers of these values.

Second, we have the entrance liturgy, in which people prepare their hearts for God's arrival. I personally find this idea the most intimidating in my day to day life. I remember reading that Corinthians passage about how people were getting sick and dying for improper communion and avoiding taking communion for months afterwards out of fear. While I now know that text was referring to some particular grievances with the communion practice that fear has not necessarily left me. I think the best way to work through this is not to see self examination as a question of "What might God be mad at me for", but "What might bring me closer to God". That simple language shift from negative to positive can help us to practice self examination more regularly. Self examination doesn't have to be done to avoid the wrath of God. Self examination can be a useful tool to understand ourselves and the world around us. It can also be incredibly beneficial to our relationships.

Something I struggled with for a long time was the need to uphold a perfect version of myself which to me meant that I was never mad at others. I would avoid telling people the things that bothered me in day to day life, until one day, I would inevitably explode and list all the ways they had wronged me so I could keep my holier than thou image. People close to me called me to do some self examination. I learned it is not fair to expect people to read my mind regarding the things that upset me, and that it is not wrong to be upset. I have learned a lot about myself in that self examination. I am not sure if I would have had such a positive outcome if I had been afraid to acknowledge my anger and my shortcomings.

Looking inward can look all kinds of ways, so I hope we can all find patterns of counselling, journalling, or just soul searching that help us see God's goodness in ourselves and others.

Finally, there is the Welcoming of the King of Glory. We need to find ways of acknowledging that our God loves us so much. That God wants to

crouch down to enter our doorways. How do we remind ourselves that God chooses us, when we often feel unremarkable, afraid, or lonely? How does this idea that God stoops down for us affect our daily lives? I think the best way to live this out is in simple, and small ways. I think it starts with being a person who affirms the goodness in others. That can be particularly difficult in certain situations. Maybe it is in traffic, or with family, or with an extra frustrating customer. For me it is when I am playing against a particularly rough soccer team. Acknowledge those moments when it is hard, and without eliminating your feelings or concerns, try to see someone who God would crouch down for.

I think in addition to affirming the goodness in others, we need to affirm the goodness in ourselves. Surround yourself with people who see that goodness. Create a culture in your friend groups or in your families that is more encouraging than discouraging. Write down things that you are proud of, or that you are good at. So many people can compliment and encourage anyone but themselves. You are worthy of encouragement and love. When I was speaking at Shekinah, the theme was peace making. We talked about different historical peacemakers, and loving our enemies, and reconciliation. But at the end of the week, I told all the little ones that if they went home and forgot every single thing I said, that was okay. As long as they remembered that God loves them very much, and that they are a special creation made by God. Like how every Veggie tales Episode ended with the phrase "God made you special, and they love you very much". I will end my sermon the same way.