



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Advent 4
December 18, 2022

The King of Glory

Psalm 24

¹ *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,*
² *for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*

³ *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.* ⁵ *He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.* ⁶ *Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*

⁷ *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!*

What is the origin of the world? Maybe you haven't thought much about that question, but I can almost guarantee that you have some wrong ideas about it. I say this because our society, the cultural waters in which we swim, has been trying – largely successfully – to pollute your mind your entire life. The beliefs – for that is what they really are – of evolutionism – though it remains an unproven theory – are falsely treated as established fact in popular media, in “science” literature, and even in “science” textbooks in public schools. This simple question can reveal the truth: Did dinosaurs exist at the same time as humans? If you said “no,” you did so because of the saturation of our culture with evolutionist ideas. Genesis tells us the real story, and that is that God created all things in six days, and that really means *all* things. Dinosaurs were created on day 6, with all the other land animals.

Or how about this one: Is the earth millions of years old? If you said “yes,” you're getting that from a culture so steeped in its own self-deceit that it doesn't even recognize it's worshipping a god of its own making. Radiometric dating systems are hopelessly flawed and the illogic of circular reasoning infects the very fabric of their religion. Beloved, we are living in a society that is perpetuating upon itself a lie, and not a very good one.

In Psalm 24, David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sets the record straight: “The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (v. 1). Our world – and everything, and everyone in it – belongs to God. Why? Because He made it and He owns it!

This is a very natural concept to us, isn't it. If you make something, it's yours; it belongs to you. The U.S. Patent Office is based on this prevailing truth; so is Copyright



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Law. If you write a book or a song or a poem, and you have that copyrighted, it's legally recognized as yours. If you invent something, and you have your invention patented, it, too, is legally recognized as yours. You made it, it belongs to you. David says, "He (God)¹ has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers" (v. 2). Scripture everywhere echoes this. God is the Creator. He made our world, our universe, everything that exists. It's His.

And it's not enough to say that the world is His, but we must go on to say that it is *not ours*. David makes this point beginning in verse 3. He asks a very pointed question, intensified by asking it in two different ways: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (v. 3) Do you think you have the right to approach God? To stand in His place? Who do we think we are? Isaiah asks: "Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, 'He did not make me'; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?"² And later, he acknowledges: "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."³ How right he was when he said to his readers: "You have everything upside down!"⁴ Upside down, backwards, and inside out; we have no more right to approach God than the average person has to sleep in the White House.

There is one exception to this, however. "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. 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" (vv. 4-6).

Are these words of comfort? Well, yes and no. It's nice to know that God does accept flawless perfection – if we had that to offer. Are your hands clean? Are they not soiled with sin? Is your heart pure? Or is it full of selfish ambition, evil thoughts, envies, lusts, self-justification, and malice toward all who oppose you? That's the short list of what I see in my heart, if I'm honest. So, yes, those without sinful thoughts and actions can approach God with expectation of blessing. But, I don't know anyone like that. Do you?

But, wait, there's another loophole here: What of the descendants of Jacob? He mentions the God of Jacob, right? Well, we don't really qualify there, either, do we. Besides, it's not the biological descendants that David is talking about, is it. No, he refers to "the generation of those who seek him." Let's be honest: nobody really seeks Him anymore. We're all corrupt; David says so elsewhere.⁵

So . . . we're stuck, aren't we. You and I have no right to approach God, we have no standing before Him. We're worthless clay and He is the righteous, almighty Potter. We're dirt, in more ways than one.

But . . . what, then, is this business about the doors? What are doors? They're points of entry, are they not? To enter a building, you have to go through the door. What's the point of entry if we want to approach God? If we're to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His presence, where do we start?

We might start with the doors of the church. This could be – very literally – the



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doors leading into the building. I know some of us have gotten very comfortable sitting at home in our pjs and slippers, sipping our coffee or tea while we watch other people worshiping in church. If that's what you *need* to do, well and good. But, if that's merely a habit you've fallen into, that's *not* good. If you're at all able, you need to get yourself here, into the building. You need to be with other Christians, you need to receive the Lord's Supper. You can't do either of those things without being in God's house in person . . . unless you can't, in which case we'll bring the Sacrament to you.

This is God's house, but not just the physical structure. It's God's house, really, because of what happens here. God's Holy Mountain is where people experience His saving presence in the Divine Service and the Holy Sacraments. This you enter, yes, by physical doors, but also by sacramental doors. In some churches the baptismal font is placed, not in front, as we have it, but at the doorway into the nave, the sanctuary. This is symbolic, dare I say, even theological, because baptism is the point of entry of most Christians into the household of God. Babies enter the kingdom of God through Holy Baptism, so the font is a door.

The fact that David calls such doors "eternal" reflects the reality that worship in our earthly sanctuary mirrors that of the heavenly dwelling of God. We sing in the Preface: "It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Therefore* with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying: Holy, holy, holy . . ." The praises we sing here to our Holy Triune God echo those of the heavenly host, which includes our loved ones who have departed in the Faith, for they have approached God; they have ascended His holy hill. How did they do that?

David asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?" And then he answers, "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." We've already established the truth that none of us qualifies for this . . . on our own. That's an important caveat! David calls Him the God of Jacob. Jacob's hands weren't clean . . . by themselves. He was a sinner just like the rest of us. So, how is it that he became God's chosen? That's just it; God *chose* him . . . and then *cleansed* him.

Look what David says: "He will *receive* blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Whom God invites into His presence, He prepares by gifting them the righteousness needed to stand before Him without fear. Jacob could stand before God, David could stand before God, your departed loved ones can stand before God, and you, my beloved brothers and sisters, will stand before God because He has invited you, He has chosen you, He has cleansed your hands, your heart, your life, your soul by the blood of Jesus. Hallelujah!

By the end of this Psalm, all attention is on God, specifically Jesus. Jesus called Himself the Door.⁶ The ontological gulf between God and man is bridged by Christ.



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Surely, God is holy; we are not. Between us and God there is an untraversable chasm . . . unpassable by anyone except by Christ. In speaking of the doors: “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,” and of the King of glory, “that He may come in,” the Holy Spirit, preaching through the prophet David, is speaking of the everlasting Son of God. “Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!”

O Jesus, King most wonderful!
O Conqueror renowned!
O Source of peace ineffable,
In whom all joys are found (LSB 554:1)

Jesus is the One who had every right to ascend the mountain of God, and He did. His hands were perfectly clean, albeit scarred with nail holes. He did not lift up His soul to what is false, nor did He ever swear deceitfully, but was, rather, lifted up on the cross to die in our place, where He cried out on behalf of all of us, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Peter wrote of Him: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth . . . He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”⁷ He became man so that as man He could atone – cleanse, purify – the sins of man, making it possible for man to approach God.

“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!” This baby, whose birth we prepare to celebrate, is the King of Glory and the Savior of us all. Lift up your hearts and voices to welcome Him. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

1. Specifically: *Yahweh*, using God’s personal name.
2. Isaiah 29:16b
3. Isaiah 64:8
4. Isaiah 29:16a
5. Psalm 14:1-3
6. John 10:7, 9
7. 1 Peter 2:22, 24



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