

# Lift up your heads O ye gates

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn to the book of Psalms, Psalm number 24, and we'll read verses 7 to 10. Psalm number 24, the psalm that we've just been singing, but we'll read in verses 7 to 10.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts.

He is the King of glory. Now, we've been looking at the book of Psalms and studying some of the best known Psalms, and we've pointed out last Lord's Day the great variety of Christian experience contained in them that makes them a very useful book to use for praise.

You've got all sorts of Christian experience in the Psalms. There's rejoicing and praise. All people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

On the other hand, you've got a great sense of lowliness and littleness. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear.

[ 1 : 49 ] And you've got a theme like Christian stability, the security that belongs to the believer. They in the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion Hill, which at no time can be removed, but standeth ever still.

A great variety of Christian experience that makes these Psalms very, very appropriate for our use in worship. But far more important than that is how these Psalms bring to us the thought of Christ. They're full of Christ. Every one of them is full of Christ. And he ought to be in our minds constantly as we sing these Psalms.

Who is it that is going to bring all nations so that they sing praise to God? Well, it is Christ that will do that through the preaching of the Gospel.

Who is going to take us from the depths and bring us to know that plenteous redemption? It's through Christ that that happens. He's the one that's provided plenteous redemption for us.

[ 3 : 02 ] And how are we going to know stability and security and protection? Through the work of Christ. And every time that we sing these experiences, varied though they be, they all point us in the same direction to the Christ that produces these experiences.

And when we've asked ourselves, what should be in our minds as we sing these Psalms, we've always come back to this. Our experience of Christ will be utter uppermost in our minds.

But besides that, there are many Psalms that speak directly and specifically about Jesus. And their whole meaning is taken up with who Jesus is.

And one of these Psalms is the one that is before us here. At least the last part of this Psalm. And what I would like to do is show how Jesus has brought our attention here.

And the way that we should think of him as he's described here. Now, this Psalm divides itself up into three bits. And I think we've already prepared the way for this in our comments on the Psalms that we've been singing.

[ 4 : 18 ] Verses 1 and 2 speak about the power of God in creation. They remind us that he has made things as they are.

And that therefore we are dependent upon him. And that idea of God the creator naturally leads on to another question.

If that's the sort of God he is, then how can we come to him? Who shall ascend into the hill of God? Who shall stand in his holy place?

And the answer that is given to that is, if you get clean hands and a pure heart, that's what God seeks in those that come to him. Hands that are not given to do sin.

And hearts that are not inclined to do sin. That's the requirements of a person that would come to know God. And then the third part of the Psalm is the one that is before us.

[ 5 : 18 ] And naturally we ask, what is this talking about? What's the meaning of these verses? They sound very glorious, it's obvious.

But what do they actually mean? And what relationship have they got with what has gone before? And what should be in our minds as we sing these words?

Well that's the sort of thing that I want to speak about this morning. What this means. What should be in our minds as we sing it. And how it's related to the rest of the Psalm.

Well, to put it at its most general, this part of the Psalm speaks to us of the ascension of Christ. It tells of Christ leaving this world and going up into the splendour and glory of heaven. How do we get that from this Psalm?

[ 6 : 20 ] Well, almost certainly, this Psalm was composed by David on a particular occasion. The Ark of the Covenant was the place where God's glory was set.

And from this wooden box covered over with gold was the cherubim engraved upon its lid. Or something like that.

The glory of God shone forth from there. And the Ark of the Covenant was the symbol of God's presence with his people. The Ark of the Covenant usually was kept in the tabernacle.

But as we mentioned, it was captured by the Philistines. And then it was returned to the Israelites. And in due course, David decided that it should be taken up into the city of Jerusalem and should be put in the tabernacle or the tent that he had constructed there.

And almost certainly, this Psalm was composed upon that occasion. And the sort of picture that he uses here is what must have been going on as that great procession with the Ark of the Covenant wended its way up to Jerusalem and approached the city there.

[ 7 : 50 ] The people are crying out, open up the gates. And they use this poetic expression, lift up your heads, O ye gates.

They're calling that the gates of the city should be opened up. They're thinking of them being raised up and opened up completely as if to avoid anybody stooping as they enter in through the gates.

And the sentry in the wall says, who is it that we have to open up to? You speak of a glorious king approaching. Who is this king of glory?

And the people answer, it's the Lord of hosts. It's the Lord that is strong and mighty. The Lord that is mighty in battle. And as they come closer, they repeat the cry, open up the gates, lift up your heads, O ye gates.

And the sentry in duty once again calls out, who is this that we have to open up for? Who is the king of glory? And they reply, the Lord of hosts.

[ 9 : 02 ] He is the king of glory. Now that's the sort of picture that this psalm puts before us. But it's just a picture. It's a picture, I think, of something deeper than that.

It's not merely that the gates of Jerusalem have to be opened up to receive the Ark of the Covenant that is being brought back to its resting place in Jerusalem.

There's more to it than that. Be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, does that simply mean that the doors of Jerusalem were ancient doors?

Or does it not perhaps point to something further? That it isn't the gates of Jerusalem that are to be opened up, but it's the gates of heaven that are to be opened up.

And when it speaks of the king, who in scripture is the king of glory? Is there not one person in particular that is the king of glory?

[ 10 : 10 ] And is it not Christ himself that above all others deserves that title? And isn't the way that he is described here mighty and strong, something that is applied to Christ?

And can't we think that here there is the prophetic voice of David speaking. He sees through that event the taking up of the Ark to Jerusalem.

And he catches that word prepared for that occasion in such a way that it describes a greater event that is yet to be in the future.

An event similar to that. An event depicted by the Ark of the Covenant being received into Jerusalem. And what this therefore refers to is Jesus.

He leaves this world. And as he approaches heaven, as it were, the angels accompany him, saying, Open up the gates. Lift up your heads, O ye gates.

[ 11 : 15 ] And a voice asks, To whom have we to open up? Who's coming? The Lord of glory. The Lord of hosts. Mighty and strong.

Mighty in battle. It's a picture of Christ. Ascending up after completing his work. After this time of humiliation and suffering and sorrow, he's going to the splendor and the glory of heaven. And he's being received there in a fitting way. As a triumphant conqueror. As a mighty hero. And he is being acclaimed by people. As he is received there through the gates of heaven to sit on the throne at the right hand of his Father.

That's the sort of picture that we have to have in mind as we sing these words. Here's a psalm, then, that speaks to us of Christ.

Of Christ in his ascension. It's a psalm that is designed to stimulate our hearts and to move us deeply.

[ 12 : 20 ] Because it speaks of glory. It speaks of victory. It speaks of the great conqueror and his reception into heaven. And what's then to be in our minds and our hearts as we sing these words?

Well, what was in the minds and hearts of the people as they received the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem? We read the story. It was a time of great rejoicing.

They were shouting and they were singing and they were dancing. They were having a party. They distributed food for people so that they could enjoy themselves. And I'm not saying that all these things have to be applied directly to our worship.

But the spirit of that is to be applied to our worship. The King of Glory being received into Jerusalem. What joy it stimulates in the heart of the believer.

And what rejoicing it caused in the way that they sang and shouted. And if we think of our Saviour and our conqueror and the glorious Lord ascending into heaven having completed his work.

[ 13 : 30 ] How can we be any less joyful? And how can we be any less moved than these people in the Old Testament when they saw the Ark of the Covenant being taken up through the gates into Jerusalem?

We must be hard-hearted indeed if we cannot rejoice at the thought of our Lord ascending to glory. We must be cold and indifferent indeed if our hearts are warmed and moved by the picture of our Lord ascending to the place that was rightfully his.

We rejoice in his exaltation. We sing happily because of the glory that has been given to him in ascending to the place of honour in heaven itself.

So that's what this part of the psalm speaks to us of. It speaks to us of the ascension of Christ. Now, to get down to details here it speaks to us secondly of the glory of Christ's conquests.

What wonderful ways are used to speak of this person here. We just want to focus our attention on verse 8.

[ 14 : 50 ] They ask who is this King of Glory? And the answer is the Lord strong and mighty the Lord mighty in battle.

And what a way what a wonderful way to speak of Jesus. Yes, it applies to the working of God in the Old Testament among his people.

Literally, the God who dwelt between the cherubim and the Ark of the Covenant was this to his people then. But as he was the Lord strong and mighty mighty in battle as he was that to his people then so Christ is that to his people too.

We see here that he is the faithful God. The Lord that word Lord is Jehovah a special word that was given to God's people to describe the way in which God dealt with them as his people.

The meaning of the word Jehovah was taught to the people through Moses when he saw God in the burning bush and when he heard God speaking to him then.

[ 16 : 13 ] And God said this is my name and I am going to redeem you I am going to take you out of Egypt because I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And that's the idea that was connected with the title Jehovah. He's the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the God that made promises then and fulfilled them to his people at a later date.

A God who was unchanging in his love and mercy that he had set upon his own. A God who would care for them and look after them according to his promise.

And that's the sort of God that is in mind here when the word Lord is used about him. and that's the way that we can think about Jesus.

Passages from the Old Testament that speak about Jehovah are applied to Jesus too. He is God. He is the covenant keeping faithful God who is with his people.

[ 17 : 32 ] He is Emmanuel which means God with us. The Old Testament prophecies refer to him as the everlasting father the prince of peace and through his humanity which was real his divine nature can be seen so that he is in human form Jehovah the covenant keeping faithful God and just as he was that by name so he was that in the work that he did.

He was faithful to the covenant. The everlasting covenant was something that had bound him to undertake the work of redemption and in terms of that covenant arrangement he came into the world and he represented his own and he stood with his own and he acted for his own and he made himself responsible for their sins and in all that he was keeping the terms of the eternal covenant. He was fulfilling the pledge that he had made to his people. He was being faithful to the commitment that he had made to them. He was showing himself to be Jehovah the covenant keeping faithful God.

As Jehovah in the Old Testament had spoken to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and fulfilled these promises throughout ages to their descendants so Jesus was faithful to the people whom he had taken upon himself to redeem and he committed himself to that task and was faithful to it even unto death.

And that's the picture that comes to us of the glory of Christ in this description. He is the faithful God the Lord Jehovah and that you see is practically useful.

[ 19 : 46 ] He's one that you can trust in. He committed himself to his own and he'll never let his own down. He's absolutely reliable.

He'll never fail anybody that puts his trust in him. What he has said he'll do and you can be absolutely sure of that.

Other people around us may fail but this one will never fail. People that we trust in may let us down but this one abides faithful because he's the covenant keeping God the Lord Jehovah.

If you commit your sins to him he'll wipe them away. If you commit your troubles to him you can be certain of this. He'll care for you in the midst of them.

If you commit your life to him he'll guard you and keep you and direct you. And because he's the covenant keeping faithful Jehovah he's one that has a right to our trust.

[ 20 : 57 ] One whom we ought to put our faith in. And then he's not only the faithful God he is the one here who is strong and mighty.

He is the all powerful one. The Lord strong and mighty. Now never let us forget the stories of the scriptures that are so familiar to us and yet do not seem to move us in regard to the power and might of the God whom we profess to know and serve.

Strong and mighty have we adequate grounds and reasonable grounds for describing God in that way. Well David as he penned these words undoubtedly did.

They could look back to the time when they had been in Egypt and by a miracle of God's power they had been redeemed from there. Look at the plagues that came up in Egypt.

No natural explanation of that will do. This was a miracle from the mighty hand of God. Look at the way that the waters of the Red Sea opened up and they were able to go through and dry land.

[ 22 : 24 ] Look at the way that the manna was provided for them and the quails came down in the desert. How could a people several millions strong be kept in the desert for 40 years but by the hand of a God that was strong and mighty?

And see how the waters of the Jordan opened up and the walls of Jericho fell down? Do you believe these stories? Because if you believe these stories then we're bound to say he is strong and mighty.

He is somebody that is irresistible in his strength. When he sets his heart up and doing something that will be performed. Nothing can stand against him.

Nothing can resist him. The forces of nature are under his control. Nations and men are held in the hollow of his hand. He rules and he does his will and his purpose can never be frustrated.

The pictures of God in the Old Testament give to us ample reason for saying he is the Lord. He is the Lord strong and mighty.

[ 23 : 30 ] And that similarly can undoubtedly be said about Jesus. He came into this world in his humanity. He came in our frailty.

He came to suffer our sorrows. He came as a man of suffering acquainted with grief. But his divine nature could not be hidden and it expressed itself in such a way that we cannot fail to recognize Jesus as strong and mighty.

He was the one that stood in the boat in the midst of the storm and said be quiet and the waves died down and the wind stopped blowing just like that.

Power over nature. He's the one that came to the girl that everybody thought was dead and told her to arise and she get up.

He's the one that came to Lazarus who was in the tomb for several days obviously and clearly dead and he says Lazarus come out and that his word of command the dead came to life and what was impossible to man took place and in Jesus there was not only power over nature and power over death we see in him mortal and spiritual power he took on the devil and he resisted his temptations after 40 days of fasting he could still refuse to turn stones into bread at the command of the evil one he denounced sin he cleansed the temple he was morally and spiritually strong and mighty and that's the sort of picture that is conjured up in our minds as we sing these words from time to time the

[ 25 : 25 ] Lord strong and mighty and this of course has practical application to us how much we belittle God God by our unbelief we bring him down to our level to not believe in his promises is an insult to his capacity and it is to deride his ability and what we need to capture is the reality of this that the Jesus that stood at the grave of Lazarus and said come out is this Jesus that is available to us in the gospel today and that is a strong and mighty to help us and to care for us as he was able to raise Lazarus from the dead can we doubt his ability then to wash away our sin is it impossible for this sort of God to deal with the problem of our sinfulness is it impossible for the one that is mighty and strong to deal with the burdens that are so heavy to us are they heavy to him heavy to him that holds all things in his hand and that is able to rebuke the wind and the waves and they obey him are our cares and concerns that weigh so heavily in our minds are they going to be too heavy for that sort of a God are the problems and difficulties that loom so large in our thinking are they impossible to this

God that we have sought to describe this rebukes our unbelief it rebukes our small notions that we have of God it rebukes our spirit of gloom and depression that says we'll never be ever any different and the church will never be any different it's impossible that we should change this goes right against that spirit of depression and rebukes us for unbelief the one who is displayed here is the Lord mighty and strong and also another aspect of this he is the one that is mighty in battle this is the particular direction in which his strength and his energy are directed he is mighty in battle this could be said about Jehovah of the Old Testament Jehovah is the one that destroyed the Egyptians in the waters of the

Red Sea after the Israelites had passed over in safety he fought against the Egyptians and he destroyed them he's the one that caused the walls of Jericho to fall down he's the one that gave victory to his people in battle and David is so assured of the presence of God with him in the battles that he fought in his name that he can say that it was God that taught his hands to fight and that taught him to wield the bow so effectively and all this is a way of seeing that the people of Israel were aware that God was on their side fighting their battles destroying their enemies and giving own according to his promise and in a spiritual sense the might and the power of Christ are directed in the same way he is a

God of conflict he is a God of battles he is a warrior king our God this is seen in his life and in his ministry there was tension and conflict from the moment he came into this world as soon as he was born into the world Herod as an agent of evil was fighting against him and that was typical of the sort of life that he lived we have already mentioned how he went into the desert to be tempted by the evil one and that was a deliberate act of battle he was led by the spirit into the desert in order to be tempted by the devil it wasn't that he happened to be there and being under pressure he felt tempted he went there he was led there in the course of his ministry by the power of the spirit in order that he would be tempted and it was a deliberate act whereby he confronted the evil one and the battle was joined there when he came across the evil one in the desert and that was typical of his life and ministry he came into this world that he might destroy the devil's works and he was very aware of being under pressure and engaged in conflict in his ministry when he announced his intention to die upon the cross and

Peter said don't be thinking about these things Jesus rebukes him and says get behind me Satan you see he knows he's fighting he's fighting a battle and he's determined that he's going to give nothing away to the power of the evil one and when he gave himself at Calvary although it seems an act of weakness although it seems as if the powers of darkness had got the better of him there

actually was Jesus deliberately doing what was necessary to destroy the powers of sin it was by giving himself at Calvary by representing his people and dying the death that they deserve to die that he was able to set them free from the grip of the evil one and in a very real sense then Jesus is a mighty conqueror a warrior who has taken on and has destroyed the greatest enemy that man can ever know namely

[ 31 : 44 ] Satan himself and so the picture that we have seen in Psalm 45 of Jesus today is of one that rides out conquering with a bow in his hand and he puts out his arrows to pierce those that are rebellious and bring them under submission he rides out with a sword girded up on his thigh in order that he might wage battle and bring people to yield to him the warrior king the lord mighty in battle that is the picture of Christ do not fight the battle against sin in your own strength look to this person as your leader and commander and trust in the victory that he has accomplished so there you see is this psalm as it speaks of the glory of Christ's conquest it shows us it shows him to us as the faithful

God Jehovah it shows us him as one that is strong and mighty it shows us him as the one that is the great conqueror who fought our battles for us so once again what should be in our minds as we sing these words once again who can feel to be moved as they think about these things as we see the glory of Christ and reflect him in his power and remember that he has conquered the greatest enemy that there is who of God's people can fail to be moved can we sing this with a steady voice even isn't the glory of this so wonderful and the picture that it brings to our minds so great that it fills us with emotion and moves us deeply and causes us to rejoice greatly in the wonderful picture that it displays of

Christ in his conquest that's the way we should sing this psalm now the final thing that I want to say is that this speaks to us of the climax of God's work this speaks to us of the climax of all God's work now what I mean by this is that this brings the psalm to a fitting conclusion we've been saying that there's a theme in this psalm but it isn't altogether appeared the connection of this last bit of the psalm with what has gone before and I would like to suggest that here we have a summary of Christian experience from the start of the psalm to the end it fits in together naturally we begin by standing in awe before the power and might of the creator we look around us at the world and we say that came from the hand of a mighty

God that's the first stage of the psalm and the first stage in some people's experience and that leads us on naturally to the second stage of the psalm if that's the sort of God that there is who can ascend up into his dwelling place who can stand in the presence of that sort of a God that's the question that the might and majesty of God makes us ask what right have I to come to him and the answer that is given is this if you've got clean hands and a pure heart that's what he looks for in those that would come to him hands that are not stained by the taint of sin that they have performed hearts that are not impure with the corruption of natural sin that's what he looks for in the folks that would come to him now isn't it true that that raises in our minds other questions it makes many people say what help is that to me my hands have performed evil and much more so my heart has been inclined towards sin what comfort does it bring to me to be told that you need clean hands and a pure heart to come to the creator of all things how is that a help to me how can

I have these qualifications and I think that it's against that background that we are led to the third part of the psalm to the person that says how can I have a clean heart how can I have hands washed from the taint of sin the answer given is simply this there is a king to whom you can look and he's a king that is characterized by glory he's the one upon whom you have to set your eyes and you have to set your eyes upon him in his majesty and in his might and in the wonder of the work that he has done you who are concerned about a pure heart look to him as the faithful God one that has pledged himself to redeem his people that's the one that you need to look at and you that are concerned with a guilty conscience and that they're burdened and weighed down by a burden of sin that you cannot bear you look to him as the one that is mighty and strong is he not one that is equipped to take that burden of you and to carry it for you and to remove it completely and you who are confronted by the workings of the evil one and feel yourself to be held in his grip and know how impossible it is for for you for you to be released for you to be released as the one that is mighty in battle then you'll see the one that you need to trust in that you need to cling to the picture that is given here is one that is altogether suitable and appropriate for anybody that is asking the question how can

[ 38 : 53 ] I have clean hands and a pure heart there is one faithful strong able there is one worthy of confidence one that will never let you down one that is able and willing to help you and that's why this is a fitting climax for what has gone before troubled by a sense of God's majesty disturbed by a sense of your own sin look to Christ and rest upon him look to his splendor and his perfection and you'll see there's somebody that will never let me down there's somebody that's able to do for me what I'm not able to do for myself and that leads us to this experience of coming to him and resting upon him and saying take away my sin remove my guilt I commit myself to you and

I rest upon you and I take you as my saviour and as my lord and I worship you as the lord strong and mighty and I adore you as the one that is mighty in battle that that that is our personal response to the one that has brought our attention here that is the way that each one of us should respond to this picture may god bless to us his own word let us pray we pray lord that this glorious picture that we sing from time to time might come home to our minds with greater power and force and that we may contemplate Christ in the glory of his ascension in the might and power of the conqueror as the one faithful and true and we pray that these characteristics of Christ might so work upon our heart and conscience as that faith may be produced within us and a strong spirit of confidence may increase increasingly be awakened help us then to have that response to him that is but fitting when we see him as the glorious and mighty  
Lord we ask this in Jesus name Amen