

HOW CAN WE STAND ON HOLY GROUND?

Psalm 24

Dr. J. Howard Olds

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A Sunday school teacher asked her young elementary class where God lives. After the usual answers of heaven, church, and in our hearts, Bobby spoke up and said, "God lives in the bathroom at our house." The surprised teacher asked Bobby to explain his answer. "Well," said Bobby, "every morning about 7:30 my Dad gets up, walks down the hall, beats on the bathroom door where my sister is locked inside getting ready for school. Then he screams, 'My God are you still in there?' God lives in the bathroom at our house."

It is human nature to search for God. The prophet Isaiah said, "*Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near*" (Isaiah 55:6). If worship makes any sense, has any meaning, fulfills any purpose, it is because people in the simple acts of worship make a vital connection with God. Psalm 24 was written to help us do that. Psalm 24 is a call to worship. Come, let's take a closer look.

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 (Psalm 24 :1-2).
GOD REIGNS.

Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book, Who Needs God says religion is not primarily a set of beliefs, a collection of prayers or a series of rituals. Religion is first and foremost a way of seeing. Religion gives us eyes with which to see the world.

"I envy the Psalmists the way I envy natural athletes or gifted musicians," continues Kushner. "I envy them for their solidity of faith, their clarity of vision, their ability to find God in the sun and the storms—so I return to the Psalms to remember what the world looks like in the eyes of the believer." When I forget it, when I get confused trying to live my life, I come back and read the Psalms so that I can understand what the world looks like for those who believe.

This is my Father's world, he shines in all that's fair.
In the rustling grass I hear him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.

Earth is crammed with heaven and every bush is alive with God.
Only they who see, take off their shoes.
The rest sit around and pick blackberries.

I cannot prove God created the heavens and earth any more than the atheist can prove it is an accident. I point to the sunrise. He reminds me of tornadoes. I suggest the beauty of a birth. He reminds me of the holocaust where babies

burned and died. Sooner or later I decide, “Will I look at life through the eyes of faith with all of its problems, or through the eyes of skepticism which has its own set of problems?” The psalmist had no trouble deciding.

If the earth is the Lord’s, the world and everything in it, then I must have some place in God’s cosmic scheme of things as well. You are no accident. Your life is no fluke. Whatever the intent of your birth parents or the circumstances of your childhood, you were created a child of God, no less than the moon and the stars; there is divine purpose in your being here.

When I was a kid, I played hide and seek on dark nights with older family members in open fields. They played a cruel trick on me. They let me hide. But they never bothered to find me. As the rounds progressed and my loneliness increased, I would stand out from behind the trees of my hiding. Still they managed not to notice. They would walk right past me, look right through me and never acknowledge my presence because they resented my participation in the game.

Life has been like a cruel game of hide and seek for many of you. You tried to play the game, follow the rules, participate to the fullest, but you’ve been ignored, looked over, maybe even ridiculed, bullied and abused—until now you wonder—who have I on earth that loves me, why have I a reason to be? If God is, why is He so silent?

The Apostle Paul strolled through the university town of Athens one day observing town monuments to many gods. When asked to speak with the philosophers this is what he said. *“I see that you are a very religious people. As I looked at your objects of worship I even found an altar inscribed ‘to an unknown God.’ Let me tell you about that unknown God.”*

That God made the world and everything that is in it. He gives all people life and breath and everything else. He so made us that we would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:22-28).

You are God breathed. You are God made. You are God known. You are God sought. You are God redeemed. You are God claimed. His child and forever you are.

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. They will receive a blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation (Psalm 24:3-4). WE REACH!

If God is, and we are not far, we’ve got some getting ready to do. If we are marching to Zion, are we ready for the meeting of Zion? If the Lord is coming, am I ready to greet Him when He arrives? The psalmist gives a couple

suggestions on how to get ready. If God is coming, then we ought to do something to prepare for it. We ought to get ready by at least doing a couple of things. We ought to wash our hands and purify our souls.

ARE YOUR HANDS CLEAN?

The psalmist evidently had a mother who made him take a bath before going to worship. Mothers are like that. They try to clean you up behind the ears and make you presentable in the house of the Lord. Where I came from there was no running water in the house. So baths were infrequent. Yet we always took a bath on Saturday night whether we needed it or not—so we would be ready to go to church on Sunday morning. You went to church with clean hands.

Maybe that's why I have always loved baptismal moments in the Church. My life can use a washing, my heart can stand a cleansing. When sin has left its crimson stain, I need to know that God can clean me up again.

Scores of people have been asking me about this huge retention basin added to the front of our campus. In jest I say, "We've surrendered to the Baptists. We are building the largest baptismal font in Brentwood. On some cold January day we are going to march all 5600 members through these waters of baptism." Well, no, we are not really going to do that. But the truth is we come to church needing washing. You and I are not presentable to God as we are. We've got some cleaning up to do. We need to be washed not out but washed up, so that we come to the Lord:

Whiter than snow, yes whiter than snow,
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven!*" (Matthew 7:21). Are your hands clean? Are you washed in the blood of the crucified one? We ought to wash up our lives; we ought to purify our souls.

IS YOUR HEART PURE?

To be pure is not to be perfect. It is to be genuine, unmixed, real, authentic. Kierkegaard once said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing." I think it's a great definition. Purity of heart is to will one thing. It's a singleness of mind and a singleness of motive. It's what you do and what you say fitting together so that you are the same day after day, inside and out, whoever sees you and whatever the circumstances of life may be. I know that's not particularly easy.

A former girlfriend wrote, "Dear John, words cannot express the deep regret I feel at having broken our engagement. Will you please take me back? Your absence leaves me empty. No one can fill the void. Please forgive me and let us start again. I love you, I love you, I love you. P.S. Congratulations on winning the lottery." Our motives are not always so pure are they? Jesus put it this way: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Matthew 5:8).

Are you willing to let each thought and each motive to be under God's control? God reigns. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. It belongs to God. If that is true, we've got some cleaning up to do says the psalmist.

The King of glory is coming and THE CONNECTION IS REALIZED. *"Lift up your heads, oh you gates, be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in"* (Psalm 24:7).

John Peterson translates this piece of the Psalm this way:

Wake up you sleepyhead city
Wake up you sleepyhead people
The King of glory is ready to come.
Don't sleep when he arrives.

Lift up your head. Look up. Take a look in God's direction and catch a glimpse of the presence of the Almighty God.

KEEP LOOKING UP!

He had no money. He owned no home. He drove no car. He was not a particularly good father. He always came to church dressed in his bib overalls. Upon turning 16 it became my service to him and the church to drive him home from worship services, something I enjoyed since it gave me a little more time behind the wheel. When I delivered Porter to the modest place that he called home, Porter would thank me for the lift, get out of the car, then peep back in with this fatherly advice, "Keep looking up." It got so I looked forward to his encouraging word more than the thrill of driving him home. When I went back years later to the little church of my childhood to preach his funeral, I talked about the man who encouraged me to "keep looking up."

Lift up your heads—what would it take for you to do that today? Life can beat us, defeat us, leave us crying for answers and clueless about causes. In moments like that we make a choice. Do we sink down to the dirt or look up to the heavens? Do we curse God and die, or praise God and live? *O soul near despair in the lowlands of strife. Hold your head up high. The Lord of glory is coming into your life.*

THE KING OF GLORY IS COMING.

In his classic novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Columbian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells of a village plagued with forgetfulness, a kind of contagious amnesia. Starting with the oldest of the population and working toward the youngest, people started forgetting the names of the most common everyday objects.

One young man however was determined to limit the damage. To do so he began labeling everything. This is a window. This is a door. The cow needs to be

milked everyday. This is the main road to our town, so forth and so on.

Then the young man made two more huge signs. The name of our town is Macondo, said one; an even larger one said this: GOD EXISTS.

In the ebb and flow of life it is not always easy to see the King of glory coming. It is not always simple to remember that He is on His way. Life leaves us forgetful. Worship causes us to remember.

The power of the Psalms is not that they speak to us. It is that they speak for us. They put into words the desires of our hearts.

Psalm 24

*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.*

*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
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 vindication from the God of his salvation.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*

*Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!
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 of hosts,
he is the King of glory!*

