

Sermon for March 20, 2016 – Palm Sunday

Psalm 24

Theme: Behold Your God, Savior and King

A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. ² For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. ³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. ⁵ He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face-- even Jacob. Selah. 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 the 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! Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah. (NASB)

When I was 15, a friend of mine asked me to come to a political rally to see a man named Helmut Kohl. Since I had just moved to Germany a few days earlier, I had no clue who he was and why I should see him, but I went along anyway because my friend invited me. I saw a lot of people carrying signs and cheering when he spoke. My friend told me that he was the prime minister of Germany and was very influential in reunifying his country. Had my friend not explained to me who this person was and what he accomplished, I probably would not have been too terribly excited to see him.

Today we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem to the shouts and praises of his people. But who is he that we should be excited to remember this event? As Christians, you and I know the answer. However, there are hundreds of people in our little city, millions in our state and billions in our world who don't and won't know who Jesus is unless someone explains it to them.

My friend was excited to tell me about Helmut Kohl because of the impact that man had on him and his nation. May the LORD grant us even greater excitement and zeal to share the message of his Son with our families, friends and neighbors. With the 24th Psalm as our guide, let us celebrate the person and work of Jesus, under the theme: **Behold your God, Savior and King**

Part One: Behold your God.

The first fact we should remember about Jesus is that He is God. Now it is important to define what we mean when we say this because many people have a misconception of what a “god” actually is. Some people think that a “god” is merely some sort of being with superhuman ability or strength. Others view “god” more like a good luck charm than anything else. People define and describe “god” in countless ways but none of them come close to being right. Only God himself can reveal to us his true ability and nature; and he does it through the Bible.

Our Psalm says: *The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.* ² *For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.* Our God is not only powerful he is all-powerful: an observable fact when you look at his creation. For example, just consider the raw power contained within our sun. Do you remember the nuclear bomb that was detonated over Hiroshima to end the Second World War? Our sun releases the equivalent energy of 1 trillion of those bombs every single second! Now consider that there are hundreds of billions of stars like our sun throughout our galaxy, and countless galaxies throughout our universe. Our God created all of this by simply saying “*Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night . . .*”ⁱ

God not only created the universe, he also created us – and I am not just talking about the general creation of man either. God personally created you, as the Scriptures say: “*You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*”ⁱⁱⁱ We are, therefore, not our own. We belong to him.

Our God is so large that He fills everythingⁱⁱⁱ and yet he knows and cares for each minute detail of his creation. He knows and directs every atom in the universe for the glory of his name – even counting and caring for every hair on our heads.^{iv} He knows our thoughts before we think them.^v This is the Almighty God we worship, who has always existed and is the source of all that is. This is why Christians get so excited when they remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: because *He* (that man on the donkey) *is the true God!*^{vi}

Let me ask you a question: how often do you think about Jesus being your *almighty* God? Sometimes we think of him as powerful, but not necessarily all-powerful; as knowing, but not necessarily all-knowing. Solomon was right when he said: “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*”^{vii} Look at the love and respect that Christ deserves from us and consider how little we actually give him. Sometimes we act as if he can't see us or think that he doesn't have the power or concern to be involved in our lives. We often treat Jesus as someone we can turn to when we are in trouble, but whom we also can ignore when things are going fine - as if He is some good luck charm, or a rainy day insurance policy. Brothers and sisters in Christ: let us repent of such thinking and worship Jesus for who he truly is: our Almighty God who is involved in every little detail of our lives – even to the point of directing every particle in this vast universe for our benefit. Offer Jesus true respect, love, and honor, because He is the LORD.

Part Two: Behold your Savior

Our Psalm continues: ³ *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place?* ⁴ *He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully.* ⁵ *He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.* ⁶ *This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face-- even Jacob.*

The LORD is so completely holy that He cannot tolerate even the slightest inclination to evil in his presence. Who can approach God? Only he who is completely perfect: who has never sinned in deed, word or thought.

Now that leaves us in a pickle, doesn't it? Are you perfect? I'm not. The Bible says that no one is – except Jesus. So where does that leave us? At God's mercy.

And praise be to God that He is merciful towards us. *Even though every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood,^{viii}* the LORD pitied us to such a degree that He took it upon himself to save us from the eternal death we faced because of our sins. And how did He save us? By taking on flesh and blood in the womb of the virgin Mary so that he could be human like us.

When Jesus walked this earth, he was tempted in every way, just as we are, but was without sin.^{ix} And yet, even though He was sinless, he took the sins of all mankind upon himself to such a degree that when God the Father saw Jesus on the cross He saw us. And God struck Jesus with the full fury of his anger over sin. Jesus suffered and died – not for his sins (because he didn't have any) but for the sins of the whole world. He paid for them all. His resurrection proves it.

And because Jesus paid for all our sins in full, we can stand before God completely free, righteous and holy. He offers this gift to all people through the proclamation of his Gospel so that everyone who repents of his sins and trusts in Him might receive the gift of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Yes, through faith in Jesus we all are the perfect man described by King David in this Psalm – righteous and holy with not even the slightest hint of sin about us. This is who we are because when God looks at believers, he sees his Son's righteousness covering them. How do I know? Because the Bible says: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*^x

Think about what this means: Through faith in Jesus we are as righteous as the Son of God himself, because his righteousness is our righteousness! This is yet another reason we celebrate Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: we know that He was riding into Jerusalem as our Savior from sin, death and the power of the devil. He came to rescue us from the hell that threatened us. He came to reconcile us with God.

Part Three: Behold your King

Now that we know exactly who Jesus is and what He has done, what shall we do with this knowledge? The last part of our Psalm offers an excellent suggestion:

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 the 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! Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.*

We can just picture the scene: a triumphant King returns to his castle while heralds call to the gate keepers to let him in. Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem certainly seems to fulfill these words of Scripture, but there is yet another way they are fulfilled – even today.

The Bible calls believers the temple of the Holy Spirit. The gate that the Lord desires to enter is the gate of our hearts. He wants to rule in our hearts so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven.^{xi}

And so Jesus has his heralds call out to us – proclaiming the good news of who he is and what he has done to save us. And just as Jesus, by the power of this word, created our universe and raised the dead, so also, by the power of His Word, He makes our unwilling hearts willing to open up to him through repentance and receive him in faith.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be heralds of this Gospel in the world – calling out to all: “Lift up the gates of your hearts! Lift them up and let the King of glory in! “Who is the King of glory?” you ask? Jesus is the King of Glory. He is the mighty LORD who has conquered sin, death and the power of the devil for us. He is the Almighty God who created all. He is our loving Savior who sacrificed himself on the cross to rescue us from hell.” Invite your family and friends to come and worship Jesus this Easter - pointing to him and saying: **Behold, here is your God, Savior and King.** Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 1:14 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Psalm 139:13 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Psalm 139:7-12

^{iv} Cf. Matthew 10:30

^v Cf. Psalm 139:1-6

^{vi} 1 John 5:20 NIV84

^{vii} Proverbs 9:10, NIV84

^{viii} Genesis 8:21 NIV84

^{ix} Cf. Hebrews 4:15

^x Galatians 3:26-27 NIV84

^{xi} Cf. Luther's explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism.